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Israeli planes rocket sites in east Lebanon

RASHAYA (R) — Israeli planes on Wednesday rocketed suspected Hizbollah guerrilla targets in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa valley, Lebanese security sources said. There was no immediate report of casualties in the attack, the eighth into Lebanon since the beginning of the year. The security sources said four planes fired a total of eight rockets in four runs into the valleys south of Zillayia in the western side of the Bekaa Valley, north of Israel's south Lebanon occupation zone. Earlier, Hizbollah guerrillas fired mortar bombs into the pro-Israeli militia outposts of Zounrayya and Hmayyid inside the zone, causing no damage or casualties, according to a South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia source. Hizbollah guerrillas are fighting to oust Israeli troops and their local SLA militia allies from the 15-km wide occupation zone.

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Arab League chief refutes reports of Arab support for strike on Iraq

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Arab League secretary general, Esmat Meguid, on Wednesday refuted statements by U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright that some Arab states were in support of a military strike against Iraq to resolve the deadlock between Baghdad and Washington.

"At this stage, it is difficult to believe that any Arab state accepts that Iraq be attacked," said Dr. Abdul Meguid, who was in Amman en route to Baghdad in a bid to convince Iraq to grant U.N. inspectors access to presidential palaces.

During her visit to Bahrain this week, Ms. Albright hinted that some Arab countries were in support of the military option.

Ms. Albright, who visited Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, indicated during her visit to Manama that the leadership would not object to the use of U.S. naval forces based in that country in any attack on Iraq, Agence France Presse reported.

Ms. Albright also said that the U.S. was confident of the cooperation of Gulf states in the event the U.S. resorted to a military option.

Dr. Abdul Meguid reacted by saying: "I heard these statements and I believe all parties are trying to reach a peaceful solution to the dangerous problem and I do not believe that any Arab state had the inclination to support [U.S.] strike against Iraq."

He said he was "authorised

by Arab leaders" to take up his mission.

"If they had any reservations, they [the Arab leaders] would not agree to send me in Baghdad," the Arab League chief said.

Earlier this week Russian and French envoys Viktor Posuvalyuk and Bertrand Dufourcq arrived in Baghdad to convince Iraqi leadership to grant a free access to U.N. inspectors.

"The situation is dangerous and difficult. And it is for us to exert all efforts to reach a peaceful solution... We are trying to find a peaceful solution and I think the mandate I have received from the Arab leaders is to try and find a solution," Dr. Abdul Meguid added.

The Arab League chief, a former Egyptian foreign minister, said that he would stress in his meeting with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein on Baghdad's full compliance with the U.N. Security Council resolutions.

He said that he could not "speak about a plan or proposals."

"I would tell you that I have to wait till I reach Baghdad and then this will be the subject of my discussion," Dr. Abdul Meguid said before leaving by land to Iraq.

"I know that my task is difficult but I will do whatever I can because the trend in the Arab World is to avoid the military strike against Iraq," he added.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Fayez Tarawneh, who received Dr. Abdul Meguid upon his arrival, also said that



Foreign Minister Fayez Tarawneh greets Arab League Secretary General Esmat Meguid upon his arrival at Amman airport on Wednesday. Following talks with Dr. Tarawneh, Dr. Abdul Meguid is due to leave on the 1,000-km drive to Baghdad, where he will try to find a peaceful solution to the crises with Iraq over arms inspections (AFP photo)

Jordan wants to see a peaceful end to the crisis.

"We believe in institutional efforts towards ending the suffering of the Iraqi people," Dr. Tarawneh said in reference to the Arab League initiative.

"We believe in the severity of the situation and also the importance of the efforts by the Arab League on behalf of the Arab leaders," he added.

Meanwhile, Lower House deputies lashed out at the U.S. and accused it of escalating tension in the region "without a legal pretext."

The deputies, who were discussing the situation in Iraq

during their regular session on Wednesday, stressed on the need to exert all possible efforts to "spare Iraq from any possible U.S. attack."

"They also called for joint Arab and Islamic action to put an end to the deadlock."

During the session, the government requested the House to hold a closed-door meeting to discuss the new developments in the crisis between Iraq and the United States.

Following the secret session, House Speaker Sa'd Hayel Srour told Jordan News Agency, Petra, that Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali

briefed the deputies about efforts by Jordan to reach a peaceful solution to the problem, especially contacts with Egypt, Iran, and the U.S.

Mr. Srour told Petra that Dr. Majali also briefed the lawmakers on all measures the Kingdom has undertaken to face the consequences of a possible U.S. strike against Iraq.

Following the session, the 80-member House issued a statement denouncing "U.S. threats to use force to settle differences" with Iraq and said that dialogue and diplomacy were the solutions to the crisis.

Deputies demand Mutawi's resignation over festival

By Fairouz Abu-Ghazaleh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Twenty-three deputies in the Lower House of Parliament on Wednesday pressed for the resignation of the information minister for allowing the recent Arabic Song Festival, which they claimed was immoral and violated Muslim beliefs.

They said they were outraged by the revealing and skimpy dresses worn by some of the singers, emcees and those who conducted backstage interviews — mostly Lebanese, Syrian and Egyptian.

But liberal lawmakers in the 80-seat House and the government hit back, saying that the four-day festival, organised by Orbis Satellite Television and Radio Network in conjunction with Jordan Television, was a great success and reflected the Kingdom's cultural openness and tolerance.

According to the Constitution, the Lower House can dismiss a minister only if the absolute majority of the House, 41 deputies, vote to do so.

"The festival included scenes and behaviour contrary to our traditions, ethics, our Islamic heritage, our national standards and our tribal norms," read a petition signed by 23 Islamist, Christian and traditionalist deputies.

The motion was circulated during Wednesday's meeting, the first since the 'Eid Al Fitr holiday ended on Sunday.

"Because all of this was broadcast live on Jordan Television [JTV] without due consideration to our feelings and to the sanctity of our homes and our honour, we declare that we are withholding confi-

dence in Minister of State for Information Affairs Samir Mutawi," they said.

They also criticised JTV for broadcasting some of the shows live.

"Is this the gift of the Ministry of Information for its people on 'Eid Al Fitr'?" Islamist Deputy Muhammad Azzideh asked. "This shameful festival ruined the happiness of all those who fasted during the month of Ramadan."

However, Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour told deputies that he did not see a reason for the commotion over the charity festival.

"It is not true that JTV displayed shows of immorality or disgrace," Dr. Ensour told the House. "Jordan is an open country."

Leftist Deputy Bassam Haddadin and liberal deputy Ali Abul Ragheb drew negative comments for defending the festival. Others wondered why citizens, who opposed such cultural performances, tuned in.

"Most of the viewing public watched the shows," said Mr. Haddadin. "The world today is a small village, and he who thinks that protecting our traditions and beliefs can only be done by oppression is mistaken."

He said opening JTV up to other satellite channels improved competition and helped promote Jordan's culture and tourism.

Mr. Abul Ragheb, a former trade minister, said the deputies' outcry was exaggerated.

"We are a democratic country that believes in pluralism," he said. "We accommodate the different tastes of our citizens and do not restrict ourselves to the tastes of a spec-

ic group of people," he told the House.

"It was a successful event, and we look forward to holding more festivals of a similar nature in the future."

JTV officials also lauded the home-made variety programmes, arguing that its variety of programmes are designed to cater to the wishes of most spectators. "We offer a variety of programmes and viewers can tune into the programme they like," one official said.

The proceeds from the show, which featured 12 popular Arab singers and many other celebrities, will go to the Young Muslim Women's Association in Jordan.

Officials say hundreds of thousands of Arab viewers from all over the world watched the show, while 12,000 spectators attended the event at Al Hussein Sports City in Amman.

The JD10-20 tickets for the event were sold out well in advance of the festival, which started on the first day of 'Eid Al Fitr last Thursday.

Local newspapers have shown similar division over the festival, with some writers praising it and others condemning the glittering show.

In an article published in the Arabic daily Al Rai on Monday, former Islamist Deputy Bassam Emoush slammed the hosts and said the show took people on a sudden jump from the spiritual and religious atmosphere of the holy Month of Ramadan to flagrant shows by its performers and presenters.

"We are not against constructive art, but what was presented to us was something else," Dr. Emoush said. "It was a show of fashion, flesh, breasts and legs."

Iraq welcomes French proposals, agrees to allow inspection of 8 sites

Combined agency dispatches

IRAQ RESPONDED favourably to key parts of a French plan to defuse a crisis with U.N. arms inspectors on Wednesday, but the United States warned that only unconditional access to suspect sites would avert the threat of a military strike.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin warned, meanwhile, that any U.S. military attack to force Baghdad to cooperate with the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) charged with dismantling Iraq could spark a world war.

"[US President Bill] Clinton's actions could lead to a world war. He is acting too brazenly there," Mr. Yeltsin said in Moscow.

The official Iraqi News Agency (INA) said President Saddam Hussein was in agreement with "key elements" of proposals put to him by French special envoy Bertrand Dufourcq in a two-hour meeting Wednesday.

Mr. Dufourcq, foreign ministry director general, presented President Hussein with a detailed plan drawn up by French President Jacques Chirac to allow U.N. arms experts to search so-called presidential sites for banned weapons.

"President Saddam Hussein said he was in agreement with the key elements in this message concerning the current situation and what must be done to reach a fair political settlement in line with Security Council resolutions and their real objectives," INA said.

Arab diplomats said the plan involved juggling the numbers of diplomats and U.N. inspectors on visits to presidential sites to meet Iraqi concerns over sovereignty.

In Cairo, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa said Iraq has agreed to allow international inspections of eight presidential sites.

"Iraq informed us that it will take this measure but refused to give more details," Mr. Musa said. "Iraq also informed France and Russia of its decision."

But the United States said any plan must involve "unconditional" access to all suspect sites for UNSCOM.

"We would evaluate any idea... in the context of our belief that UNSCOM needs unfettered, unconditional access to the sites it needs to inspect," said White House spokesman Michael McCurry.

"The reason we are circumspect about evaluating these ideas is we want to see what they really are. But no matter what they are, in our view they need to meet the test that UNSCOM has made quite clear. They need unconditional, unfettered access to the sites."

Mr. McCurry also insisted that President Yeltsin's comments about the threat of a new world war had been "revised and amended."

"His [Yeltsin's] very talented and able press secretary has already revised and amended that remark," said Mr. McCurry.

Mr. McCurry said President Yeltsin's press secre-

tary had also said "that the interpretation of that remark by American journalists was ridiculous and absurd" and that it was "due to their less than proficient skill in Russian language."

"We are confident that the purpose of Russian diplomacy is to pursue a diplomatic solution to this matter," Mr. McCurry added.

British and U.S. ministers are to visit Gulf Arab states to secure political and logistical support for possible military strikes against Iraq, diplomats said on Wednesday.

"They are trying to avoid previous mistakes and hold real consultations with everyone in the region to bring everybody to their side and explain what are the concerns over Iraq," said a senior Western diplomat.

Early next week, U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen will also tour the region to secure pledges of logistical support for U.S. forces in the Gulf in case of military action and the possible dispatching of added troops and hardware.

"The Kuwaitis are fine, they are on board and ready to help," said one diplomat, confirming earlier remarks by defence sources that the tiny state had agreed in principle to offer political support and logistical backing in case of a strike.

U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich Tuesday rejected an invitation issued to members of the U.S. Congress to tour suspected weapons sites that Baghdad has declared off limits to U.N. inspectors.

"If it is Saddam Hussein's

desire to be included and recognised in the world community, he must accept unlimited and unconditional U.N. inspections," he said in a statement.

"He must also pledge to dismantle terror weapons of mass destruction. Anything short of full compliance with those requirements will be viewed as unacceptable."

Arab League Secretary General Esmat Meguid arrived in Baghdad later Wednesday as part of a flurry of diplomatic contacts to broker a peaceful solution to the standoff.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem also arrived in the Iraqi capital on Wednesday, and Russian envoy Viktor Posuvalyuk is still in Baghdad after meeting President Saddam on Monday.

INA said the Iraqi president had welcomed all initiatives and that "constructive dialogue" with the Russian envoy had allowed for "important progress."

Mr. Cem was scheduled to meet with Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz on Thursday to urge the Iraqi leadership to end its weapons of mass destruction programmes.

"Our aim is to ensure that the children of the region do not live through the disaster of war, that they grow up secure and do not suffer pain," Mr. Cem said before leaving.

Turkey demanded that Baghdad either comply with United Nations obligations or suffer the consequences of a military strike.

(Continued on page 3)

Russian Duma adopts appeal to Yeltsin over Iraq

Combined agency dispatches

PALESTINIAN NEGOTIATORS will hold meetings with U.S. officials in Washington Monday and Tuesday in the United States' latest attempt to break the peace process deadlock, a Palestinian official said.

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat told journalists Wednesday that he would meet U.S. special Middle East envoy Dennis Ross for two days of talks on U.S. proposals for a promised Israeli troop withdrawal in the West Bank.

An Israeli delegation is expected to hold similar talks in Washington, but a day for the meetings has not been announced.

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright convinced the two sides to send officials to Washington in a bid to keep talks alive after her weekend mission to the region failed to reach a breakthrough in the stalemate.

Ms. Albright had tried to push through a U.S. bridging proposal for a step-by-step Israeli withdrawal in the West Bank, in which each step

would be linked to Palestinian action against anti-Israeli groups.

Mr. Erekat said he would ask the United States to draw up "mechanisms to force Israel to fulfil its commitments."

Mr. Erekat said he had met Mr. Ross in London on Thursday, but denied a report in the Israeli daily Maariv that he also met Mr. Netanyahu aide Yitzhak Molcho in secret face-to-face talks.

Meanwhile, Nabil Shaath, minister of planning and international cooperation in the Palestinian National Authority, said an Arab summit should be held to create a European-style troika to press the United States and its Western allies to get Israel to move on Middle East peace, a Palestinian official said in remarks Wednesday.

"At this summit, Arab heads of state should choose three leaders who will go to U.S. President Bill Clinton to tell him that all our potentials and our relations with you will be linked to what you do for the Palestinian cause," Mr. Shaath told the United Arab Emirates

Palestinians to meet U.S. officials next week on peace process

Combined agency dispatches

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daily Al Itihad.

"They should tell him that we cannot accept that you abandon the peace agreements which you witnessed."

Mr. Shaath, who was referring to the 1993 autonomy deal between Israel and Palestinians, said the Arab troika should also see the leaders of France, Germany and Britain besides the European Commission, the governing council of the European Union (EU).

The troika is comprised of the past, present and future presidents of the EU.

"They should tell them we want a joint European move because if the peace process falters, then we will be faced with a catastrophe on the Arab, Israeli and world levels," he said.

Mr. Shaath also urged Arab countries to set up a fund with a capital of at least \$500 million to help Palestinians in the self-rule areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"Any talk about Palestine outside this practical framework is a waste of time," he added.

However, Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz has said Turkey would side with its close ally the United States in demanding Iraq submit to U.N.-mandated arms inspections.

launched frequent bombing strikes on Iraq during the 1991 Gulf war but they have not taken part in subsequent punitive strikes by Washington.

Turkish and U.S. officials say Washington has not asked Ankara for the use of Incirlik in any possible strike against Iraq during the current crisis.

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Algerian forces kill 31 rebels — papers

PARIS (R) — Algerian government forces have killed 31 Islamist rebels in their latest offensives against guerrilla strongholds, Algerian newspapers said Wednesday.

On the diplomatic front, an Algerian newspaper quoted official sources as saying Foreign Minister Ahmad Azaoui might decide against meeting British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook in London because the Algerian government largely blames Britain for jeopardising a dialogue with the European Union.

Al Watan said troops heavily shelled a rebel base in Bouhanifia area in the western province of Mascara and then stormed it, killing 19 gunmen on Monday.

In other military operations

near Algiers — in Blida and Bouira — 10 rebels were killed on Monday and Tuesday, said Al Khabar. It said two more died in the western Relizane area.

Reports of massacres of hundreds of villagers in Relizane early in January put the six-year-old Algerian crisis under the world spotlight and brought a European Union team of junior foreign ministers to Algiers.

Algerians told the EU it would continue a dialogue with it and the EU said Algerian Minister Attaf would later visit London to meet Mr. Cook, whose country holds the rotating EU presidency.

But Le Matin newspaper, quoting Algerian officials, on Wednesday said Mr. Attaf

might have scrapped this because Algerian authorities saw Britain's stand as a part of the problem.

"Britain is leading the dialogue between Algeria and the EU into a dead end," said Le Matin, quoting the officials.

Le Matin said the authorities considered Mr. Cook's insistence on Algeria opening a wide dialogue, including the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), was interference in its affairs.

The Algerian government, rejecting EU demands that Algerians allow an international probe into the massacres, wants the dialogue and links with the EU to be focused on muzzling exiled Islamists and bolstering economic coopera-

tion. Le Matin said Algeria seemed to have washed its hands of serious dialogue with the EU during 1998 because it appeared to have no strong belief in the EU presidencies this year.

"Algiers also expects little from [the next presidency holder] Austria, which distinguishes itself with a complete lack of knowledge of Algeria's problems and the Arab World as well as the Third World in general," said Le Matin, quoting official sources.

Algerian ambassador to Washington Ramtane Lamamra was quoted on Wednesday by the official Algerian news agency APS as saying the security situation

was under control.

"Terrorism does not now represent a threat to the national security even though it still constitutes a major challenge to public security in some areas," he said.

Interior Minister Mustapha Ben Mansour, visiting the western province of Tlemcen where 15 civilians were killed on Monday at a fake road-block attack, said on Tuesday that "the state is strong with its means and men. The government is determined to fight the forces of evil implacably."

Western estimates say more than 65,000 people have been killed in Algeria's violence since 1992, when the authorities cancelled a general election in which the FIS had taken a commanding lead.

Egypt says it won't join U.S.-led strike on Iraq

CAIRO (AFP) — Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on Wednesday ruled out Egyptian participation in any U.S.-led military strike against Baghdad over its failure to allow U.N. arms inspectors to search sites in Iraq.

"We are not ready to participate with the United States in any military action," Mr. Mubarak told reporters who asked what course of action Egypt would take if diplomacy failed to defuse the U.N.-Iraq crisis.

Mr. Mubarak warned however that Iraq will face dire consequences unless it complied with U.N. Security Council resolutions.

"We ask Iraq to implement the U.N. Security Council resolutions. This is very important because otherwise there will be grave consequences," Mr. Mubarak told reporters after inaugurating a nuclear reactor with Argentine President Carlos Menem.

The United States has warned of a possible military strike against Iraq if Baghdad refuses to grant full access to U.N. arms inspectors, including access to so-called presidential palaces.

Egypt, one of several Arab countries that took part in a U.S.-led coalition that drove Iraqi troops from Kuwait in 1991, has repeatedly said this week that it was opposed to the use of force against Iraq.

Arab League chief Esmat Abdul Meguid travelled on a peace mission to Baghdad on Wednesday at Mr. Mubarak's request to discuss with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein a peaceful way out of the crisis.

"There are no Egyptian proposals but we ask Iraq to avoid the dangerous consequences and implement the U.N. resolutions," President Mubarak said when asked if Mr. Abdul Meguid was taking specific proposals to end the crisis.

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on Tuesday wound up in Cairo a European and Arab tour to garner support for a military strike, saying that the United States and Arab countries favoured diplomacy.

But she warned that failure by President Hussein to comply would mean a military strike on Iraq.

During a stopover in Shannon, Ireland, on her way back home, Ms. Albright said how-

Syria would not support U.S. strike against Iraq — Khaddam

DAMASCUS (AP) — Syria said Wednesday that a military strike on Iraq would be unjustifiable and dangerous for the Middle East.

Syrian Vice President Abdul Halim Khaddam told reporters of Syria's concern about a threatened U.S. strike against the Baghdad government after a two-hour meeting with Iranian parliamentary speaker Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri.

"Any military strike against Iraq would be a very dangerous issue and would create a dangerous state in the region," Mr. Khaddam told reporters. "Such an act is absolutely unwarranted."

The Syrian vice president spoke as diplomatic efforts intensified to resolve the crisis posed by U.S. threats to resort to force if Iraq does not grant full access to U.N. inspectors seeking to visit suspected weapons sites.

Iran, which has long seen Syria as its closest ally in the Arab World, has also rejected military action against Iraq.

Mr. Nouri, who arrived Tuesday for a three-day visit to Syria, said he and Mr. Khaddam expressed "identical" opinions on the Iraqi showdown and other Middle Eastern developments.

Mr. Nouri is scheduled to leave Syria Thursday for Lebanon.

Albright, on behalf of the Arabs, that the Arab countries are opposed to the use of force against Iraq.

Meanwhile, in Moscow, Russian President Boris Yeltsin warned that U.S. President Bill Clinton's actions over Iraq could trigger a world war.

ever, "While they prefer a diplomatic route, as we do, none of the Arab leaders said 'go home and tell the president not to use force.'"

Her statement contradicted reports from Cairo the previous day saying that Mr. Mubarak would tell Ms.

Israeli army raids Palestinian village for car thieves

ZAHERIYA (AFP) — The Israeli army conducted a massive raid on a Palestinian village Wednesday, arresting at least 10 suspected car thieves and seizing dozens of stolen vehicles, witnesses said.

Several dozen soldiers, accompanied by a helicopter, entered the West Bank village of Zaheriya, south of Hebron, after dawn and broke into homes to arrest Palestinians suspected of being part of car theft rings, the witnesses said.

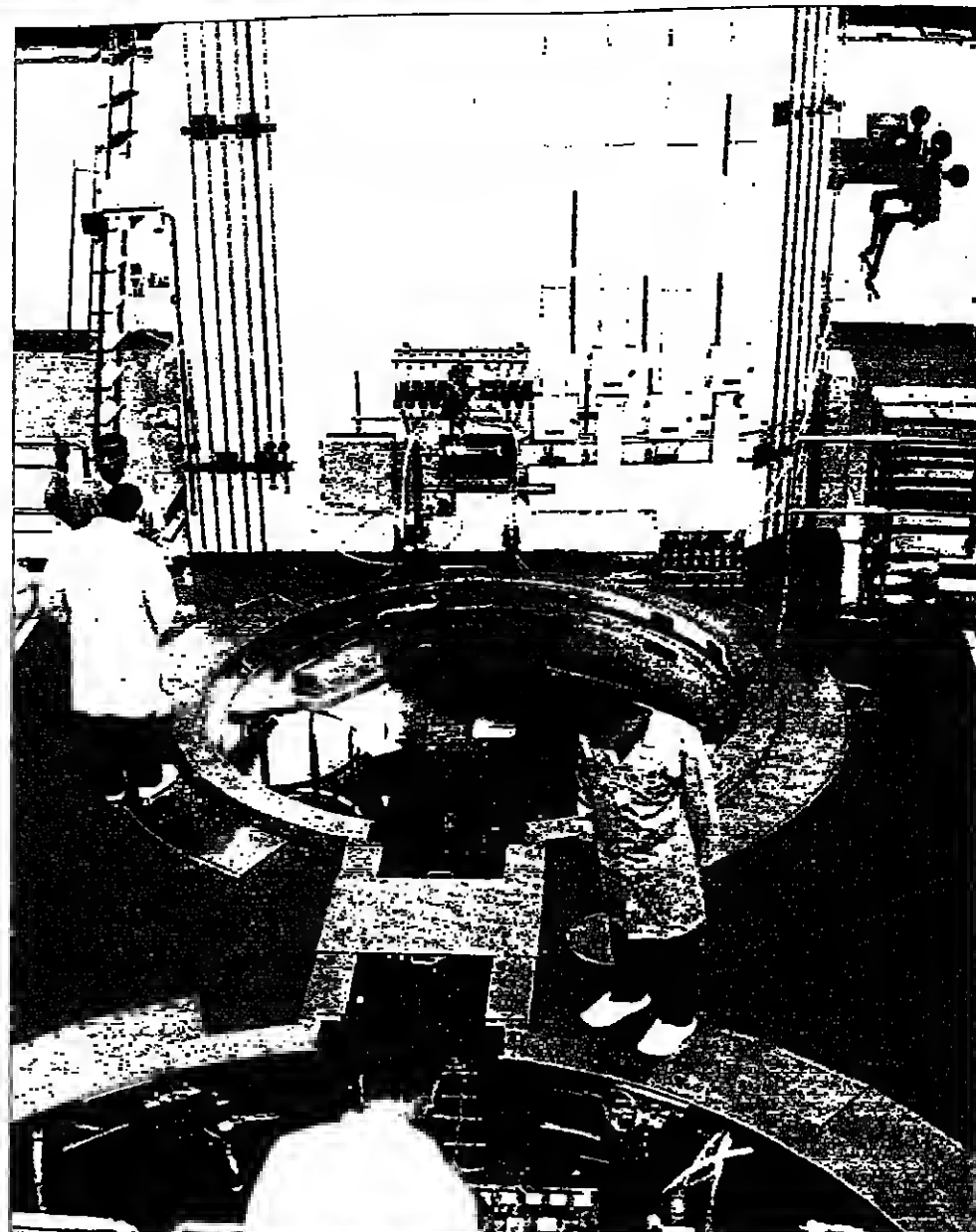
Soldiers beat family members who resisted the raids, they said. At least 10 people were arrested and several dozen cars were seized in the raids, which continued into the morning.

It was the first such large-scale raid over car thefts by the Israeli army. Zaheriya is under civilian control of the Palestinian National Authority and has a large Palestinian police station, but Israeli troops have the right to enter.

Israel has frequently protested that Palestinian security services are not doing enough to stop the huge West Bank trade in cars stolen from Israelis.

An epidemic of car thefts in Israel has hit new highs, with some 41,335 cars reported stolen between January and November last year, up 28 per cent from 1996, according to Israeli police.

Mr. Mubarak said the 22 megawatt reactor was a "successful example of cooperation between coun-



Egyptian workers talk Wednesday inside the newly opened nuclear research centre in Inshas, some 60 kilometres north of Cairo. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak urged Israel to allow international inspection of its nuclear installations as he inaugurated the Argentine-built non-military nuclear reactor with Argentine President Carlos Menem (AFP photo)

Presidents Mubarak, Menem open Egypt's second nuclear reactor

INSHAS (AP) — Argentine President Carlos Menem and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak inaugurated Wednesday Egypt's second nuclear reactor.

Speaking at the opening ceremony for the reactor, built by an Argentine company, Mr. Mubarak obliquely criticised Israel by calling for a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East where all countries would open their atomic sites to international inspection.

Israel has long refused to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and neither confirms nor denies reports that it has built atomic weapons.

Mr. Mubarak said the 22 megawatt reactor was a "successful example of cooperation between coun-

tries of the south." An Argentine state-run company won the contract to build the \$154 million plant, as well as the \$4 million fuel-producing station at Inshas, 60 kilometres north of Cairo.

The new reactor has 11 times the output of Egypt's Russian-built reactor that went on stream in 1961.

President Menem, who flew in from Beirut earlier Wednesday, said: "We also support a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East."

The Argentine president is scheduled to hold talks with Mr. Mubarak on the Middle East peace process and bilateral relations before leaving for the United States Wednesday evening.

The vice president of Egypt's atomic agency,

Ibrahim Abdul Razek, says the new reactor will help the country's health care system by producing cobalt-60 for radiotherapy.

During his three-day visit to Lebanon, President Menem called for a peaceful settlement of the dispute between Iraq and the United Nations, but said Baghdad must comply with U.N. resolutions.

The United States is trying to rally support for a possible military strike against Iraq over Baghdad's refusal to grant U.N. inspectors access to presidential compounds and other "sensitive sites" on grounds of national sovereignty. The inspectors are charged with supervising the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Iran paper calls for convicted German's execution

TEHRAN (R) — A conservative Iranian newspaper on Tuesday called for the execution of a German businessman condemned to death in Iran for having sexual relations with a Muslim woman.

"There is enough evidence proving the guilt of this German citizen and this criminal should be executed under Iran's laws," said the daily Resalat, which is close to conservative clerics and merchants.

"We hope that... threats by Western officials and a few so-called human rights circles will not lead to justice being trampled in Iran," the newspaper said.

German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel said on Sunday that he and the Bonn government were shocked by the Tehran court ruling last week against 56-year-old Hamburg businessman Helmut Hofer.

He urged Iran to free the man and said bilateral ties would be damaged if the sentence were carried out.

Iran said any attempt to link relations to the death sentence was illogical, and said the verdict complied with valid Islamic legal procedures.

"Western governments, and particularly Germany, have become insolent, and so have foreigners who lightly break

Iran's laws. We should carry out our Islamic laws to prevent this from continuing," the newspaper said.

Under Iran's Islamic laws, a non-Muslim man having sex with a Muslim woman outside of wedlock faces the death penalty. German media have said the woman was sentenced to 99 lashes.

Iran's media have not reported the details of the case and it was not clear whether the supreme court had upheld the death sentence.

German media quoted Mr. Hofer's attorney as saying he had fallen in love with an unmarried 27-year-old Iranian

medical student while on a business trip to the northeastern city of Mashhad. The two had only kissed once, the lawyer said.

Iranian lawyers said the sentence could be quashed if the two agreed to marry, which would usually require the German to convert to Islam first.

Relations between Germany and Iran have been improving since they were plunged into crisis in April by a Berlin court verdict that Iran had ordered the killing of four Kurdish dissidents shot in a Berlin restaurant in 1992.

Iran condemned the verdict and denied it was involved in terrorism.

Fire bomb placed at home of Rabin's assassin

TEL AVIV (AP) — A firebomb with a lit fuse was thrown Wednesday near the home of Yitzhak Rabin's assassin and was extinguished by passers-by, the assassin's mother said.

The incident came a day after

vandals spray-painted "Rabin is a traitor" on a Jerusalem memorial to the prime minister who was shot dead by an ultra-nationalist Jew, Yigal Amir, during a peace rally in November 1995. The outlawed anti-Arab

Kach group claimed responsibility for defacing the memorial.

Amir, who killed Rabin to stop the land-for-peace process with the Palestinians, is serving life in prison.

Amir's mother, Geula, said a firebomb, with its fuse lit, was discovered early Wednesday near the gate of the family's home in the central town of Herzliya by passers-by who extinguished it.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

Thursday Programmes

14:10 The Dinky Di's
14:30 The Prince and the Pauper
15:00 French Programmes
17:00 NBA
18:00 Marker
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 Documentary
19:30 News Headlines
19:35 Big Brother Jake
20:00 Trivial Pursuit
20:30 Lois and Clark
21:10 The Opra Winfrey Show
22:00 News in English
22:59 Feature film "Jiji"
23:59 Comedy

Friday Programmes

14:10 Ruxpin
14:30 Wishbone
15:00 French Programmes
17:00 Lucky Luke
18:00 Tarzan
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 Documentary — Allo la Terre
19:35 F.R.I.E. N.D.S.
20:00 Life on the Internet
20:30 The Album Show
21:10 Adventures of Brisco County
22:00 News in English
22:30 Feature film "A Promise Kept"
23:59 Comedy

PRAYER TIMES

05:04 Fajr
06:23 Sunrise Doha

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

11:50 Dhuhr
14:50 Asr
17:16 Maghreb
18:35 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweetfield, Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
632785.
St. Joseph Church Tel. 634590
Church of the Annunciation Tel.
637440.
De la Salle Church Tel. 661757.
Terra Sancta Church Tel.
622366
Anglican Church Tel. 652826.
Armenian Catholic Church
Tel. 771331.
Armenian Orthodox Church
Tel. 775261.
St. Ephraim Church Tel.
771751.
Armenian International Church
Tel. 865897
Evangelical Lutheran Church
Tel. 824328.
German-speaking Evangelical
Congregation Tel. 688404
The Latter-Day Saints Tel.
654932.
Church of Nazarene Tel.
675691.
The Evangelical Local Church
in Amman Tel. 811295
English-speaking
Latin Catholics Parish Tel.
614190.

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Sunny and warm weather conditions will prevail during the weekend becoming relatively cool at night with winds southeasterly moderate. On Friday evening, a cold air mass accompanied by a depression will affect the Kingdom and last two days. In Aqaba, winds will be northerly moderate and seas calm.

Amman07/19
Aqaba11/26
Deserts04/20
Jordan Valley12/24

Yesterday's high temperatures:
Amman 17, Aqaba 25 Humidity readings: Amman 43 per cent, Aqaba 35 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY
AMMAN:
Dr. Munther Al Oraini779959
Dr. Mukhlis Masrahrah820425
Dr. Wissam Hayyan748363
Dr. Khalid Abdo657129
Firas pharmacy661912
Ferdows pharmacy773336
Al Asema pharmacy637055
Nairoukh pharmacy623672
Al Salam pharmacy636730

Yacoub pharmacy644945
Shmeisani pharmacy637660
Najib pharmacy847632
IRBID:
Dr. Ghazi Ta'anneh250080
Al Quds pharmacy(—)
ZARQA:
Dr. Ziyad Jghaitim992991
Khalifeh pharmacy585417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre637111
Civil Defence Department661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue630341
Civil Defence Emergency199
Rescue Police 192621111, 637777
Fire Brigade617101
Blood Bank775121
Highway Police843402
Traffic Police896390
Public Security Department630321
Hotel Complaints605800
Price Complaints661176
Water and Sewerage Complaints897467
Amman Municipality Complaints787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance)121
Overseas Calls010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs623101
Abdali Telephone Repairs661101
Jordan Television773111

Radio Jordan774111
Water Authority680100
Al Hikma Modern Hospital156155
Electric Power Company636381
RJ Flight Information 44-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
Hussein Medical Centre813813/32
Khalidi Maternity644281/6
Akleh Maternity642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity642362
Malhas, J. Amman636140
Palestine Shmeisani 607071
Shmeisani Hospital669131
University Hospital843845
Al-Muasher Hospital667279
The Islamic, Abdali 666126/37
Al-Ahli, Abdali664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen777101/3
Al-Bashir,775111/26
Army, Marka891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital602240/50
Amal Hospital674155
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery865199
ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital09983323
Zarqa National Hospital

09900560
Din Sina Hospital (09)986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital09990990
IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital021275555
Greek Catholic Hospital02127275
Ibn Al Nafees Hospital021247100
AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital03314111

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44)53200 where it should always be verified.
Information on other flights are supplied on phone 44 (52700) or 44 (53250).

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
08:25Bombay (RJ)
08:30Sanan (RJ)
09:10Riyadh (RJ)
09:30New Delhi (RJ)
10:05Beirut (RJ)
10:05Muscat, Doha (RJ)

10:15Doha, Bahrain (RJ)
10:30Colombo (RJ)
16:25London (RJ)
18:05Kuwait (RJ)
18:55Bongkok, Calcutta (RJ)
19:05Abu Dhabi, Al Ain (RJ)
19:20Moscow (RJ)
21:05Tunis, Athens (RJ)
22:50Larnaca (RJ)
02:00Jeddah (add) (RJ)

Other Flights

13:15Riyadh (SV)
14:10Sharjah (AH)
15:00Doha (QR)
15:20Muscat, Doha (GF)
16:00Dubai (EK)
16:30Rome (AZ)
20:00Tel Aviv (MS)
20:10Beirut (ME)
20:40Cairo (MS)
23:10Istanbul (TK)
23:30London, Beirut (BA)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
06:20Beirut (RJ)
10:00Moscow (RJ)

10:30 Abu Dhabi, Al Ain (RJ)
11:00 Amsterdam, Chicago (RJ)
11:45Tunis (RJ)
12:05Kuwait (RJ)
12:10Athens, Paris (RJ)
12:15London (RJ)
19:35Larnaca (RJ)
20:30Jeddah (RJ)
21:00Cairo (RJ)
21:00Jeddah, (add) (RJ)
23:00Jakarta (RJ)
23:00Kuala Lumpur (RJ)
04:20Casablanca (add) (RJ)

Other Flights

00:35Amsterdam (KL)
03:00Athens (OA)
06:40Beirut, London (BA)
08:00Beirut (ME)
11:20London (BA)
14:45Riyadh (SV)
15:00Algiers (AH)
15:55Doha (QR)
16:20Abu Dhabi, Doha (GF)
17:00Muscat, Dubai (EK)
17:30Rome (AZ)
21:20Tel Aviv (LX)
21:40Cairo (MS)
08:00Beirut (ME)

Royal Wings

(For Thursday and Friday)
06:45 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
08:15Aqaba (RW)
09:30Amman (QAIA) (RW)
16:45 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
17:55Tel Aviv (RW)
20:30Amman (QAIA) (RW)
21:50Aqaba (RW)



PRINCE ALI OPENS KINDERGARTEN: His Royal Highness Prince Ali on Wednesday opens a kindergarten affiliated with the Circassian Society in the Wadi Seer area. Prince Ali met with the society's officials, who briefed him on the kindergarten's objectives and activities (Petra photo)

Jordan, Algeria sign programme to implement media agreement

AMMAN (Petra) — Jordan and Algeria signed an executive programme Wednesday for the implementation of a 1996 agreement in the field of mass communications and media.

The programme, which was signed by Minister of State for Information Affairs Samir Mutawi and Algerian Minister of Culture and Communications Hamawi Habib Shawqi, is designed to further bolster bilateral relations in information fields.

It provides for cooperation between the two countries' national radio and television institutions, encourages cooperation between the national news agencies, and

allows for training courses for media personnel.

Under the programme, Jordan and Algeria pledge to broadcast programmes on each other's economic, cultural and social life, exchange experts and technicians in information documentation, exchange visits by television crews to film documentaries about urban and rural life in the two countries, agree to coordinate their positions in media-related affairs during international conferences, and exchange publications and documentary materials.

The signing of the programme followed the Algerian minister's meeting with Prime Minister

Abdul Salam Majali on Tuesday, during which they reviewed the situation in Algeria and the Middle East peace process.

Also Wednesday, Mr. Shawqi visited the Jordan News Agency, Petra, and discussed cooperation in news material exchanges between Jordan and Algeria with Petra Director General Abdullah Etoun.

He later visited Jordan Radio and Television Corporation and inspected their facilities and extended an invitation to the corporation's director to visit Algeria to pursue discussion on a detailed programme for future cooperation.

House members praise court ruling revoking amendments to press law

By Fairouz Abu-Ghazaleh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A number of deputies on Wednesday hailed a recent ruling by the High Court of Justice revoking tough government amendments to the 1993 Press and Publications Law introduced in May while Parliament was in recess.

The revisions generated a barrage of criticism at home and abroad for stifling press freedoms.

The High Court said the introduction of the temporary law was unconstitutional since there was no state of emergency or necessitating circumstances for the government to change the previous law.

"The High Court's decision is an historic ruling which proves the integrity and independence of our judicial system," Deputy Khalil Haddadin, a Ba'athist, told the Lower House on Wednesday, its first session since the surprise ruling was passed on Jan. 26. "It is a victory for the country's three branches of power and for freedom of expression."

Leftist Deputy Bassam Haddadin urged the government to allow the 13 weeklies that were forced to shut down in September because of the revisions to resume publication.

"I ask the government to allow the suspended weeklies

to publish immediately," Mr. Haddadin said.

Police on Monday ordered the confiscation of all copies of Hawadeth Al Sa'a weekly, which printed its first post-ruling edition. The government seized the copies after it said that all weeklies that intend to resume publication must apply for a new licence under the 1993 law.

The government argued that it cannot discuss the court's ruling since it has not been "officially" notified of the verdict.

"The government has not yet been notified through the official channels of the High Court's ruling," Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour told the House.

As far as the government is concerned, Dr. Ensour said, "it's as if the ruling were never handed down and, therefore, we cannot comment on its details."

He added that some of the papers' decision to recently republish was illegal.

"Our rule is to enforce the law, and it was not legal for these papers to publish," he said.

"I fear that the court's verdict was a political one," Deputy Hamadeh Farahneh told the House.

He was interrupted by House Speaker Said Hayel Srour, who said deputies should not intrude on the judicial authority.

"No matter what our per-

Lawyer forwards High Court verdict to government

AMMAN (J.T.) — The office of lawyer Hani Dahleh, who won a case at the High Court of Justice against the government, has forwarded the court ruling to the prime minister.

Mr. Dahleh, who filed a lawsuit on behalf of five suspended weekly newspapers contesting the constitutionality of the 1997 temporary Press and Publications Law and won, forwarded the court ruling to the government in a letter dated today, Feb. 5, and faxed a copy to the Jordan Times Wednesday.

In its ruling on Jan. 26, the court stated that the law was unconstitutional. The government reacted by saying that it would not review the status of the suspended weeklies until it received the court verdict.

On Tuesday, the government confiscated all issues of Hawadeth Al Sa'a, one of 13 weeklies that were suspended last summer.

Tajeddine Hroub, the weekly's publisher, accused the government of putting off the implementation of the High Court's ruling.

Saying that he would abide by the government's decision, Mr. Hroub noted that the government was not adhering to the Constitution, as article 26 states that the High Court decisions are final and not subject to appeal.

The Ministry of Information and the

Press and Publications Department ordered the confiscation after the government said that all weeklies must reapply for a new licence under the 1993 Press and Publications Law in order to resume publication.

According to a statement issued by Minister of State for Information Affairs Samir Mutawi, the government had not been informed of the High Court's ruling. Dr. Mutawi on Tuesday said that once the government was informed, the prime minister would issue an executive order to the concerned authorities to implement the court's verdict.

Earlier in the week, the government said it was considering contesting the court's ruling. One minister told the Jordan Times, however, that the Cabinet was still undecided on whether to take the issue to the Court of Cassation or the Higher Council, which is entrusted with interpreting the Constitution. The Higher Council is chaired by the Senate speaker and comprises three senators and five senior judges.

The temporary law was endorsed by a Royal Decree during the Lower House's recess last May. The High Court ruled that it was unconstitutional since no state of emergency or necessitating circumstances existed to warrant its passage.

Meanwhile, the House's 12-member national guidance committee appeared inclined to return to the government the revisions to the 1993 Press and Publication

Law as a way out of the legal bind.

Officials have said the government, taken by surprise, plans to contest the High Court's ruling.

Court overturns rape conviction

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Court of Cassation Wednesday overturned a November 1997 ruling convicting a man for raping his 14-year-old daughter and ordered his immediate release from prison.

The father, A.A., was found guilty by the Criminal Court on Nov. 16 of raping his daughter 30 times and was sentenced to 22-and-a-half-years in prison.

But in its ruling, the Court of Cassation stated that the Criminal Court relied only on the child's testimony, "which after examination proved to be contradictory."

"The girl contradicted herself several times in her testimony and lied in some of her statements," the court said.

Therefore, the court ordered, "his immediate release from prison."

The defendant had been in detention since April 28, 1997.

The defendant's defence had argued in their closing argument that the girl had testified that she was raped by her father for two months once every other day and did not become pregnant.

Furthermore, the defence also relied on the forensic examination, which proved that the girl was a "virgin."

Police continuing search for parties involved in pharmacist attacks

By Rana Hussein
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Public Security Department Director General Nisouh Muhiddin on Wednesday said authorities were still looking for the parties responsible for the murder of a pharmacist and the shooting of another in Amman on Tuesday.

"We have good description of the man who attacked the pharmacist in Jabal Taj, and we are exerting our utmost efforts to locate him," he told the Jordan Times Wednesday.

"It is too early to speculate on the motives behind both incidents, but once our investigations are completed, we

will reveal all details regarding the two cases."

Farouq Malhas, 37, owner of Wadi Al Nasser Pharmacy on Wadi Rimani Street, was found dead behind his counter at around 7:00 p.m. with a bullet wound to the forehead.

An hour later, police were called to investigate a similar attack in Jabal Taj, only three kilometres away. Abed Ali, 50, owner of Dalia Pharmacy, was shot in the left shoulder by an unidentified assailant, who fled the scene after a passerby intervened.

According to witnesses, the unidentified assailant tried to shoot Mr. Ali again, but ran out of bullets. Instead, he

pushed him against the counter glass, which broke.

According to head of the National Institute for Forensic Medicine, Mo'men Hadidi, Mr. Malhas died from a sole gunshot wound.

Dr. Hadidi added that the bullet was removed from Mr. Ali's left shoulder. He is listed in good condition at a local hospital.

According to officials who were present at the scene of the crime, police found no money in Mr. Malhas' pharmacy but were not sure if it had been stolen. A cabinet used for storing "sensitive drugs" was broken, indicating that the assailant might have stolen some of the con-

tents. One source said nothing was stolen from Mr. Ali's pharmacy "because of the struggle that ensued between the two."

The sources said the bullets, retrieved from both victims, were sent to the criminal lab for analysis.

In October and November 1994, three pharmacists were killed in three different pharmacies in the Amman area. All three were shot at close range by unidentified assailants.

Officials at that time said the deaths could be theft- or drug-related. No one has been apprehended in connection with those murders.

Man stabs pregnant woman to death to 'cleanse family honour'

By Rana Hussein
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — A pregnant 30-year-old woman was stabbed to death by her younger brother in Jabal Nasser in what the assailant described as a crime of honour, according to official sources.

The victim, Nawal Abdul Razzaq, was stabbed at least 30 times in several parts of

her body by her 21-year-old brother, who surrendered to police shortly after the incident, the sources said.

According to the source, the suspect, whom he would not identify, told police that he killed his married sister to "cleanse his family's honour, because he suspected that she was involved in an immoral relationship."

The source stated that the suspect went to his sister's

house in Jabal Nasser on Tuesday, inquired about the manner, then drew a knife and stabbed her to death.

The head of the National Institute for Forensic Medicine, Mo'men Hadidi, told the Jordan Times on Wednesday that the woman was in her first trimester of pregnancy.

"Our forensic examinations indicated that the woman had been pregnant

for two weeks," Dr. Hadidi said.

Police contacted by the Jordan Times Wednesday evening confirmed the incident but refused to elaborate.

Nawal became the fourth female reportedly killed in the Kingdom in a crime of honour since the beginning of the year.

Last year, around 25 women reportedly were killed for the same reason.

Iraq welcomes French proposals, agrees to allow inspection of 8 sites

(Continued from page 1)

"If Iraq does not heed our warning, it will lose its right to criticise Turkey's future position," Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz told reporters. "A U.S. operation to enforce U.N. resolutions will have some sort of justification."

The Iraqi leader, in his meeting with the French envoy, stressed the "need to respect the sovereignty, dignity and security" of Iraq and the "need to lift sanctions beginning with the oil embargo," INA said.

Economic sanctions imposed on Iraq following its 1990 invasion of Kuwait cannot be lifted until

UNSCOM certifies that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction have been destroyed.

In Paris, foreign ministry spokeswoman Anne Gazeau-Secret said France remains opposed to the use of military action.

"We do not favour military action to resolve the crisis... We are still seeking a political, peaceful and diplomatic solution," she said.

She said Mr. Dufoucq, the highest-ranking French official to visit Baghdad since the Gulf war, was expected to return to Paris "tonight or tomorrow."

Russia and France are proposing similar ideas —

involving a role for U.N. Security Council permanent members — for UNSCOM to be granted access to the eight presidential sites which Baghdad has declared off-limits.

The U.S. Cable News Network reported Wednesday that Iraq is prepared to allow international arms inspectors "comprehensive access" to the eight sites.

Quoting unnamed sources, CNN said the inspections would be allowed for a period of around one month and, for reasons of sovereignty, would be termed "visits," not inspections.

UNSCOM spokesman Ewen Buchanan told AFP

in New York that based on the information reported on CNN, the Iraqi proposals were not acceptable.

"If the proposals are reported correctly and in full by CNN, it appears that they are not in conformity with earlier demands by the Council for immediate, unconditional and unrestricted access," Mr. Buchanan said.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Sahhaf on Saturday renewed an invitation for the 15 Security Council states and 21 countries which are in UNSCOM to provide inspectors for the sites.

Passport department begins distributing updated version

By Jumana Abu Hannoud
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Jordan has begun issuing new passports to citizens to facilitate their travel worldwide, Awni Yirfas, head of the Passport Department, said Wednesday.

Over 300 copies of the newly formatted document were issued at the department's Amman branch Monday, the first day of their actual distribution, he said.

Distribution in other governorates will follow suit under a gradual plan. Mr. Yirfas said the department had obtained 350,000 copies of the new passports, enough to meet the Kingdom's needs for 1998.

He said carriers of old passports that have not expired are not required to replace or renew them before their original expiry date.

"They will continue to be valid until then," Mr. Yirfas told the Jordan Times.

The new format is in line with standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organisation and the International Air Transport Association to facilitate the issuance of visas by streamlining all needed information.

The size of the document and the colour of the covers — green, red, brown and blue — remain unchanged depending on whether they are ordinary, diplomatic, special or temporary passports.

However, pages are now printed horizontally instead of the present vertical form and their number has been reduced to 48 from 60.

The holder's full name, mother's maiden name, place and date of birth, issue and expiry dates are displayed on the front page instead of being scattered across the first three pages as in the past.

The national number, given to everyone who is included in a family book, has been moved to

the front page instead of the last page.

"The document disorganised information like occupation, height, or colour of hair and eyes, which are considered unnecessary and would complicate future plans to computerise all data," explained Mr. Yirfas.

But two things remain unchanged, at least for now.

First, the present JD20 charge to issue a passport is still in effect.

Second, the new format still has a page for social status, which leaves optional room for including the wife or wives. The same page also allows for the inclusion of up to nine children in the passport of either parent.

Mr. Yirfas said lost or damaged passports will be easier to replace under the new format, which will also make them difficult to forge.

what's going on

FILM

"Colour and Space" (in English with commentary in Arabic by Dr. Mazen Asfour) on artist Gotthard Gumbert at Dana Al Fuman, Jabal Weibdeh on Thursday at 5:30-7:00 p.m.

LECTURE

"Urban Development at Amman's Citadel" (English) by Dr. Ignacio Acea at Institute Cervantes, Jabal Amman on Thursday at 5:00 p.m. (to be followed by a guided tour in the citadel on Friday, Feb. 6 at 9:00 p.m.)

EXHIBITIONS

* Valentine's Day bazaar at Jordan Design and Trade Centre of Noor Al Hussein Foundation, off Wadi Saqr Street (Tel. 6991412), until Feb. 14.

* Private collection of Mamlouk Bishara entitled "A Vision, An Identity" at Dana Al Fuman, Jabal Weibdeh, until March 5 (Tel. 643251).



HOUSE COMMITTEE MEETS WITH ITALIAN DELEGATION: The chairperson and members of the Lower House of Parliament's Arab and International Affairs Committee and a visiting Italian parliamentary delegation, headed by Senator Achille Occhetto, Wednesday discuss scopes of bilateral coordination and consultation on issues of common concern. Abdullah Jazi, the committee's chairperson, reiterated Jordan's firm position on the peaceful resolutions of conflicts. The Italian delegation, which arrived from the occupied West Bank on a one-day visit to Jordan, left for Syria late Wednesday

Armenia plunged into crisis by president's resignation

YEREVAN (AFP) — Armenia was plunged into political crisis Wednesday after President Levon Ter-Petrosian resigned amid a bitter dispute over a proposed peace deal for the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Mr. Ter-Petrosian resigned Tuesday night, saying on national television that he had been asked to do so and had agreed in order to avoid "destabilising" the Caucasus republic.

Armenian lawmakers voted Wednesday to accept Mr. Ter-Petrosian's resignation, and parliamentary speaker Babken Araktsian announced he too would stand down.

In his televised speech, Mr. Ter-Petrosian said that "in the current situation, the application of the president's constitutional rights would threaten to destabilise the situation in the country, therefore I agreed to the request and I present my resignation."

The president's resignation follows months of political tension, with Mr.

Ter-Petrosian facing off against Prime Minister Robert Kocharian, who led the Armenian separatist campaign for independence from Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Armenian opposition also accused Mr. Ter-Petrosian of rigging the September 1996 presidential elections, and mounted protests that turned violent in the aftermath of the vote.

Under the Armenian constitution, the resignation of both the president and the speaker of the parliament — who would have replaced Mr. Ter-Petrosian as interim head of state — means Mr. Kocharian will lead the republic until new elections can be organised.

But under the Armenian constitution Mr. Kocharian cannot stand in a presidential election because he is not an Armenian citizen.

Alexander Iskandarian, a political analyst at the Moscow Centre for Caucasus Studies, said Mr. Ter-Petrosian's decision to resign was less a victory

for Mr. Kocharian than for the entire opposition, which has become increasingly vocal since Mr. Ter-Petrosian in October announced support for a controversial peace deal.

The outgoing president had pushed for a "step by step" settlement of the crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh, a breakaway mountain enclave in Azerbaijan whose mostly Armenian population is supported economically and militarily by Yerevan.

Mr. Ter-Petrosian sought "confidence-building measures" which would have included withdrawal of the Armenian troops currently occupying one-fifth of Azerbaijan and repatriation of some one million Azeri refugees who fled the territory.

He also wanted Azerbaijan to lift its embargo on Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh before discussing the enclave's status.

The peace plan he supported was put forward by the so-called "Minsk

Group" — France, Russia and the United States, under the auspices of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The Armenian majority in Nagorno-Karabakh drove out Azerbaijani government forces in a 1988-1994 war that killed 20,000 people and saw the flight of the enclave's ethnic Azeri population.

A shaky ceasefire has been in effect since May 1994, as both sides attempt to reach a compromise on the enclave's status with help from the OSCE.

Mr. Iskandarian said the Armenian opposition and the whole of the political establishment were against making any unilateral concessions and favoured a comprehensive deal which would settle all issues concerning Nagorno-Karabakh immediately, especially its international status.

"The issue is central in Armenian political life, and no president can maintain a different position," the analyst commented.



Rescue workers surround the crashed cable car after a U.S. military aeroplane hit the cable car line above the northeastern Italian ski resort town of Cavalese (Reuters photo)

Shocked Italians angry at U.S. low-level flights

CAVALESE, Italy (R) — Italians Wednesday reacted with horror and indignation at the deaths of 20 people whose cable car smashed into a mountain after a low-flying U.S. warplane clipped its overhead wires.

While police in the northeastern town of Cavalese finished identifying the bodies of the 20 victims, mostly foreign holidaymakers making their way back from the Cermis ski resort to Cavalese, 30 km north of Trento in the Italian dolomite mountain range.

The dead included eight Germans, five Belgians, three Italians, a Polish woman and her 13 year-old son, an Austrian man and a Dutch woman, said Francesco Palazzolo, a spokesman at the office of the Trento prefect, the official government representative in the region.

The cable car, descending from Cermis to Cavalese, plunged 200 metres onto a part of the mountain not used for skiing.

Italian television morning showed pictures of police sifting through the mangled wreckage of the bright yellow cable car, crushed almost flat like a cardboard box, with blood and body parts visible.

Witnesses said a second cable which had been left dangling after the plane hit the wires was still bang-

ing in mid-air. The one passenger of the second cabin had been rescued and was resting in the Cavalese hospital in shock, police said.

Politicians said the EA-6B Grumman Prowler, a four-man surveillance aircraft, had been flying too low and joined a unusually strongly worded call by President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro for an urgent revision of rules governing military flights.

"We certainly can't say this was an accident. The Cermis tragedy has to be attributed to the planes which irresponsibly fly at a low level," the head of Italy's Greens party in the Lower House chamber of deputies, Mauro Paissan, said.

The hard-left Communist Refoundation Party, whose support gives Mr. Prodi a parliamentary majority, lost no time in renewing calls for a full review of U.S. And NATO bases in Italy.

"American bases have to be closed once and for all on our soil," Refoundation's President Armando Cossutta, said in an interview.

The tragedy was the second worst cable car accident on record. In a grim coincidence, the worst occurred at almost the same spot in March 1976 when cables snapped, killing 42 people.

Police take possession of video tape of Princess Diana in Paris

ADELAIDE, Australia (AFP) — Police officers Wednesday took possession of a video tape shot by an Australian couple which could provide clues into the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, in Paris last year.

Police sources said the development follows a formal request from French authorities. The video was shot outside the Ritz Hotel where Diana and her boyfriend Dodi Al Fayed had been dining before they died in a high-speed car crash in August.

It shows a white Citroen AX, a car of similar size to the Fiat Uno French police have been seeking, members of Diana's entourage and the paparazzi.

Australian police contacted the couple's lawyer Monday to request the original tape, which was shot while Kloe Papazahariakis and Vlad Borovac were holidaying.

The couple approached police with the tape in November when it was scientifically analysed and copied. "They (the police) looked at and took extracts from the original last time... this time they have a request from the French government for the original," said the couple's lawyer, Duncan Hart.

"I haven't had any indication what specifically they are interested in, but I would assume that it is the paparazzi vehicles which are shown plainly in the tape."

Mr. Papazahariakis and Mr. Borovac, who run an exclusive Adelaide fashion store, have since gone into hiding.

French police suspect the Mercedes-Benz the princess was travelling in clipped the rear of a small white car in a road tunnel, swerved violently and smashed into a concrete pillar.

Ms. Papazahariakis said they did not realise the significance of the video until several weeks later when they returned to Australia and a friend told them police were looking for a white car.

"That's when it dawned on us that our film could be important," she recently told London's Daily Mirror, which has bought their story and still photographs of the car. Australian Consolidated Press is also believed to have paid for the story.

Sierra Leone junta authorises publication of eight papers

FREETOWN (AFP) — The Sierra Leone military junta Wednesday authorised eight of the country's 20 newspapers to continue publication by renewing their registration, the ministry of information announced.

A ministry official quoted by state radio said "the list of eight will be revised from time to time to accommodate others."

Some journalists and owners have shown anger at the obligation to apply for registration on an annual basis, when their licence to print comes from the regime that seized power last May and which they consider undemocratic.

The eight papers authorised Wednesday were named as the government-owned Daily Mail, the Expo Times, which is close to the junta, the independent Pool, the pro-conserv-

ative Pathfinder, the radical Torchlight, the We Yone, the New Life and the New Pioneer.

Another newspaper, the Independent Observer was suspended "temporarily" for what the radio announcement said, "is the violation of the ministry's order that all newspapers must halt circulation until it releases the names of all publications that have been approved."

Under the Newspapers (Amendment) Act of 1980 all newspapers in circulation in Sierra Leone should be renewed annually with a fee of \$1,000.

The measure caused particular anger last November when Lieutenant-Colonel Johnny Koroma's regime sought to carry out a review, some six months after ousting elected President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, whom he has since

pledged to restore to office next April.

Relations between the press and the junta have also been marred by detentions, some of which have prompted allegations of torture.

One paper, the Standard Times, was "temporarily suspended," while two journalists on another paper, the Herald Guardian, remain detained at the maximum security prison in the capital Freetown.

Under the act, the ministry can turn down a renewal application or suspend or cancel such application already approved. In such a circumstance, an aggrieved proprietor has the right of appeal to the High Court in Sierra Leone. Any proprietor who contravenes the act is liable to a fine of \$1,000 or a jail term of not exceeding one year or both.

Chinese premier accuses the U.S. of wanting to rule the world

BEIJING (AFP) — Chinese Premier Li Peng has launched a scathing attack against the United States accusing it of wanting to rule the world and meddling in the internal affairs of other countries, it was reported Wednesday.

The aggressive tone adopted by Mr. Li in an interview given to a U.S. monthly and reprinted by the official Xinhua news agency contrasted with a new climate of détente between Washington and Beijing following President Jiang Zemin's trip to the United States last year.

"We could never agree to the U.S. claiming 'leadership over the world' and I'm afraid that most countries in the world won't agree to that," Mr. Li told the China Information, a monthly English journal published in the United States.

"We cannot tolerate U.S. interference in the internal affairs of other countries," he said.

"The United States always tries to place its domestic laws beyond international laws and requires other countries to abide by U.S. laws. This is the divergence between us and the United States."

Mr. Li, who is due to step down in March after 10 years as premier, has never been invited to the United States, where he is viewed as the main person behind the 1989 massacre of pro-democracy students in Tiananmen Square.

"From another point of view, the divergence between the United States and China is partly because of a lack of mutual understanding," he said.

"We should say that China has much more knowledge about the United States than the United States has about us."

However, he hailed Mr. Jiang's trip saying it "was the first visit by a Chinese head-of-state to the United States in the past 12 years and was a significant breakthrough, marking an end to the West's unjust sanction against China."

Khmer Rouge called for 'negotiated settlement' to Cambodian conflict

BANGKOK (AFP) — Khieu Samphan, nominal head of the Khmer Rouge, called for a "negotiated settlement" Wednesday to the Cambodian conflict and repeated the guerrilla movement's demand to be part of a national government.

"The Khmer nation calls on all national forces to cooperate and reach a negotiated settlement (to the conflict) without winner or loser," Khieu Samphan said, as quoted by Khmer Rouge radio monitored here.

Khieu Samphan is the president of the Party of National Solidarity, which has replaced the former Cambodian Communist Party, and the prime minis-

ter of the "provisional government" set up by the guerrillas.

Khieu Samphan and Ta Mok, the Khmer Rouge military chief, have retreated with their resistance fighters to their base in Anlong Veng, in northern Cambodia, from where they lead guerrilla operations against government troops near the Thai border.

Khieu Samphan blamed the current fighting on the "aggressive war of Communist Vietnam... and dishonest foreign businesses who have come to pillage Khmer land," a recurrent theme in Khmer Rouge propaganda.

"The formation of a national government is the

only way to put an end to the war and to achieve a durable peace in Cambodia," he said.

The isolated Khmer Rouge has been trying to return to Cambodian political life after its infamous leader Pol Pot was apparently ousted from the movement's leadership last summer, analysts in Phnom Penh say.

They are said to have changed their ideology and are now in favour of the installation of a "pluralist and liberal democratic regime" in Cambodia.

More than a million Cambodians died under the Khmer Rouge's reign of terror from 1975 and early 1979.

Afghan opposition claims Kabul rocket attacks

ISLAMABAD (R) — An Afghan opposition coalition claimed responsibility Wednesday for rocket attacks on Kabul and said it would strike the capital again unless the Taliban militia ended air raids on opposition positions.

Abdullah, a spokesman for the northern-based opposition coalition, told the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) news agency by telephone from Afghanistan that his forces fired rockets on Kabul which injured one child.

Mr. Abdullah told AIP that the attacks would continue unless the Taliban, which control Kabul and two thirds of the country, ended air raids on opposition positions.

He told AIP, which is based in the Pakistani border town of Peshawar, that civilians living close to Kabul airport, the apparent target of the rocket attacks, should move to safer areas unless the Taliban ended the air raids.

He was speaking as Kabul residents reported

that the fourth rocket in 24 hours had hit Kabul airport, which is used for civilian, aid and military flights.

There appeared to be no damage to the runway, witnesses said.

A child was injured Tuesday by a Soviet-built Frog-7 missile that hit the eastern Yakatoot suburb close to the airport.

Two more rockets landed in open ground in the southwestern Dashti Barchi suburb but there were no reports of casualties.

Tucker executed as final appeals fail

HUNTSVILLE, Texas (R) — Ax murderer Karla Faye Tucker was put to death by lethal injection Tuesday, becoming the first woman executed in Texas since the civil war. She moved her lips as if in prayer as she died and gave a soft moan.

Tucker, convicted for the 1983 murder of two people with a pickax during a burglary, died at 6:45 p.m. (0045 GMT Wednesday), eight minutes after a fatal mix of chemicals was injected into her arm as she lay strapped to a cross-shaped gurney in Huntsville state prison.

"She gave a soft moan," said David Nunnelee, spokesman for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, who announced she had been executed.

"I am going to be face-to-face with Jesus now," said Tucker in her final statement, according to television reporter Vicente Arenas of KTRK in Houston who witnessed the execution.

"She gasped twice and then she kind of groaned as the air came out of her lungs," said Arenas. "She moved her lips as if in prayer."

Her death came after a flurry of last-minute legal motions failed in state and federal courts. Texas Governor George W. Bush cleared the way for the execution when he denied her final appeal for a stay.

In contrast to the drawn-out appeals, the execution lasted only seconds, witnesses said. "It was cer-

tainly less than a minute. It was quite quick," one witness said.

Tucker's case won international attention because of her gender and her religious conversion while on death row, with appeals for a reprieve coming from Pope John Paul and the European parliament among others.

U.S. television evangelists Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell — normally supporters of the death penalty — also called for her sentence to be commuted to life imprisonment because she said she "found Jesus" and repented for the crimes.

Death penalty advocates let up a cheer outside the prison when the execution was announced, while opponents chanted and prayed nearby. Police kept the two groups, which numbered about 1,000 people in total, separated.

In her final statement, Tucker apologised to relatives of the two victims who witnessed the execution in an observation room next to the death chamber.

"I would like to say to all of you, the Thornton family and Jerry Dean's family that I am so sorry. I hope God will give you peace with this," she said.

Richard Thornton, the husband of Tucker murder victim Deborah Thornton, muttered at the convicted killer as she was led into the chamber.

"Here she comes, baby doll. She's all yours," the wheelchair-bound Mr.

Thornton said, according to Mr. Arenas. "The world's a better place," said Mr. Thornton.

"I have nothing but sympathy and sorrow for the family (of Tucker). They are now going through what we went through," Mr. Thornton told reporters later.

Others witnessing the execution included husband Dana Brown, whom Tucker married by proxy a few years ago, and Ronald Carlson, brother of Deborah Thornton. Carlson forgave Tucker and did not want her to die.

Tucker's husband said he was "losing a wife, losing someone who was precious to the human race."

Arenas said Tucker never closed her eyes in the execution chamber.

"She never closed her eyes. As a matter of fact as we left the chamber her eyes were still open and she was staring a blank stare into the ceiling of the execution chamber," he said.

Tucker's execution focused both national and world attention on the death penalty as few other cases have in the United States, where 39 of 50 states have the death penalty on the books but none practice it as much as Texas.

Last year, 37 men were executed in Texas, the most in the state's history.

Tucker pleaded for mercy on the day before her execution, saying "there should always be a

place for mercy" in an interview on the Christian broadcasting network, while her lawyers mounted fruitless last-minute appeals.

"I hope she will be an example that will make America think about the death penalty and how it has been devoid of mercy, and how the only thing valid when we play the death penalty is politics and vengeance," said Amnesty International spokeswoman Bianca Jagger on CNN outside the Huntsville prison less than an hour before the execution.

Tucker, 38, received the death penalty for the 1983 pickax murders of Jerry Dean and Thornton during a burglary. She said she was a drug-addicted prostitute at the time, but said she found Jesus behind bars.

An accomplice, boyfriend Daniel Garrett, was also sentenced to death but died of liver disease in prison.

Convicted ax murderer Chipita Rodriguez, said to have killed a horse trader in south Texas, was the last woman executed in Texas. She was hanged from a tree in 1863.

Only one woman, 52-year-old Velma Barfield of north Carolina, has been put to death since a Supreme Court ruling reinstated the death penalty in 1976. She was accused of poisoning four people, including her fiancée and mother.

Sonia Gandhi strikes back at Indian election critics

NEW DELHI (AFP) — The Italian-born widow of assassinated Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi Wednesday dismissed criticism over her foreign origins ahead of upcoming polls saying she was a dyed-in-the-wool Indian.

"I will be an Indian as long as I breathe," Sonia Gandhi told a crowd of about 70,000 in the north-western city of Udaipur while campaigning for her husband's once-dominant Congress party, the Press Trust of India reported.

"I am not only the daughter of mother India but it is the land of my husband too," she said.

India's dominant Hindu nationalists, widely tipped to top the February-March national elections but fall short of a clear majority, have increasingly resorted to attacking Sonia Gandhi.

Mrs. Gandhi has been drawing huge crowds throughout India since she took to the political trail on Jan. 11 in an attempt to drum up support for Congress party.

Accompanied by her son Rahul, Sonia Gandhi said the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Indian People's Party, was trying to whip up religious tension to win the election.

"For the sake of power, these forces are attempting to drive a wedge between brothers and instead of finding solutions to the current political crisis, they are coining new slogans every day to mislead people."

BJP President Lal Krishna Advani recently said the Congress reliance on Sonia Gandhi showed its political decay.

"A party with 113 years of history, a historic record and leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi... What has happened to it?"

"Today, they have to coin a slogan: 'Bring Sonia save the country'... It is not a political party any more. It has no principles, it has no values left."

Another BJP leader claimed Indians were celebrating the rise of Sonia Gandhi in Indian politics.

Sonia Gandhi, who became an Indian citizen in 1986, married into the well-known Nehru-Gandhi family in 1968. Her husband, Rajiv Gandhi, was prime minister in 1984-89. He was assassinated in 1991.

Meanwhile, the BJP said in an election manifesto released Tuesday that it was committed to building a "magnificent" Hindu temple in the northern town of Ayodhya.

The BJP and its Hindu allies were blamed for the demolition of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya on Dec. 6, 1992. The incident sparked nationwide religious violence.

Hindu nationalists argue the 16th-century mosque was built on top of a temple commemorating the birthplace of the Hindu god Rama which was destroyed by the Moghuls.

Sonia Gandhi told an earlier election rally that her husband had told her a month before his 1991 murder that nobody could raise the mosque as long as he was alive.

The BJP, which overtook the Congress as the largest political group in 1996 elections, is currently trying to forge pre-poll alliances in order to launch a coalition.

But experts say Sonia Gandhi's campaigns have boosted the morale of the Congress which had been hurt by defections and corruption allegations against top leaders.

The current elections are, however, expected to lead to a hung parliament.



Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga (right) shares a joke with Britain's Prince Charles while Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike (left) sits on the other side during celebrations to mark the country's 50th anniversary of independence in the capital Colombo (Reuters photo)

Days of British Raj recalled amid modern military show

COLOMBO (AFP) — Sri Lanka's military put on a show Wednesday with a mixture of tight security and scenes straight from the British Raj as the country celebrated its 50th anniversary of independence.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga set the tone when she arrived for the golden jubilee celebrations escorted both by jeeploads of black-clad army commandos armed with sub-machine guns and 20 mounted troopers in spiked helmets armed with lances.

The tightest security was in place for the celebrations attended by Britain's Prince Charles.

Commandos guarded the parade enclosure near parliament while navy boats patrolled an adjacent lake and an anti-aircraft gun crew searched the skies.

Intersections on approach roads and railway crossings were blocked with parked buses or trucks as a precaution against Tamil Tiger rebel attacks. Policemen were stationed every 30 metres along the approach.

As it turned out, almost four hours of official cele-

brations, the highlights of which was an hour-long military parade, passed without incident apart from a few cases of near-sunstroke.

In addition to cricket and Morris Minor cars, Sri Lanka's have inherited from their former colonisers the British passion for military parades.

Some 9,000 personnel from the army, navy and air force — plus an elephant — took part in Wednesday's march past, a mixture of Sandhurst military academy and South Asia.

Commanders of the three services began the parade, followed by a vintage British scout car, three armoured cars, three Russian-made VBR armoured personnel carriers and 12 tanks swivelling their gun barrels at guests.

Jeeps and trucks towing mortars or field guns followed before the pagantry began, with hand-drawn twirling batons, red-coated bandmen and sword-carrying officers. Troops mostly carried sub-machine guns or T-56 rifles, a descendant of the Kalashnikov.

Star of the show was an elephant adorned with an ornate blue coat and special flaps fitted to the ears. Killed haggipers played "Scotland the Brave," possibly in deference to Prince Charles's enthusiasm for that country. More pipers followed when the navy's white-uniformed contingent marched past.

Apart from a contingent in the march past, the air force provided three Israeli-made Kfir fighters for a flypast. They were followed by six Bell helicopters and five Russian-made Mi-24 helicopters.

The most poignant moment came when veterans crippled in the long Tamil separatist war passed the podium in wheelchairs. "We pay homage to disabled soldiers who have done yeoman service for their country," the announcer said amid applause from the VIP crowd.

Far away from the ceremony, meanwhile, the armed forces were taking more casualties in the seemingly endless war as Tamil Tiger rebels pounded the eastern coastal town of Batticaloa and wounded 20 people.

Taiwan gets new interior minister in major cabinet reshuffle

TAIPEI (AFP) — Senior parliamentarian Huang Chin-wen, one of the architects of Taiwan's constitutional reforms, is to take over the powerful interior ministry in a major cabinet reshuffle announced Wednesday.

The shake up, affecting nine ministers, saw the national island get its third interior minister in just over eight months.

Incumbent Yeh Chin-Feng was moved to an outside post, while Education Minister Wu Jing, rated in polls as the most popular minister in the cabinet, was dropped from the inner political circle.

The interior post has been the target of wide-ranging criticism since a law and order crisis last year which led to the resignations of Prime Minister Lien Chan, Interior Minister Lin Feng-Cheng, two other ministers

and the police chief.

Yeh Chin-Feng, who replaced Mr. Lin and resisted pressure to resign over the ongoing high-profile murders and kidnappings, agreed to step aside in the reshuffle to become deputy secretary-general of the ruling Kuomintang.

Nine ministers are affected by the cabinet shake up announced Wednesday by Premier Vincent Siew.

He denied criticisms that he had reshuffled his cabinet just for the sake of change saying it was in response to calls for "the injection of more new blood into the cabinet" when he took over the cabinet's helm eight months ago.

The adjustment is to meet the public's ever changing needs," Mr. Siew told reporters.

The KMT leaders promised a cabinet shakeup after the party's rout by the

opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in Nov. 29 local polls.

KMT spokeswoman Huang Li-Ching said: "Siew said he realised that the new team would comply with the party's policies and bring the government policies in to full play."

Mr. Wu, the popular reform-minded education minister, has been replaced by Lin Ching-Chiang. Mr. Wu declined the offer to become a minister without portfolio.

Mr. Siew did not specify why Mr. Wu was replaced though he did hail Mr. Wu as an person of innovation and aggressiveness.

He stressed that "the cabinet is a team," and underscored the importance of cooperation between different government agencies in implementing government policies.

Mr. Wu reportedly was at

odds with leaders of the defense ministry over a military training programme for female college students.

Government spokesman David Lee has been promoted to deputy foreign minister in a job swap with Chen Chien-Jen, while Chiao Jen-ho, vice chairman of the semi-official Straits Exchange Foundation, becomes the overseas Chinese affairs commission minister.

Lai Kuo-Chou, a son-in-law of President Lee Teng-Hui has been appointed chief of the KMT's youth affairs department.

Other changes include Youth Affairs Commission Minister Lee Chi-Chu, National Science Council chairman Huang Chen-tai, Labour Affairs Council chairman Chan Ho-Sheng and Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission Minister Chiao Jen-Ho.

Relatives cling to fading hopes after Philippines air crash

SAN ROQUE, Philippines (AFP) — Anguished relatives clung to shreds of hope Wednesday that survivors might be found in the wreckage of a crashed Philippine jet carrying 104 people even as medical teams prepared body bags for the dead.

"Unless we see the dead we will always have hope," said Vigilante Soljeon whose sister Georgia Soljeon was on board the Cebu Pacific Air DC-9 that crashed Monday in rugged, jungle-covered mountain terrain.

This is the last best chance of finding someone alive out there in the mountains," Ms. Soljeon said.

As an advance search team who started their arduous trek Tuesday reached debris at the crash site 150 metres from the summit of the towering Mount Sumagaya, medical teams dispatched to this small village began preparing body bags.

There were no reports of bodies or survivors, but the search team spotted some bloodstained debris from the plane, including torn cloth from a curtain and business cards from passengers. A five-man paramedic team was winched from a helicopter on to the summit and was working its way down towards the crash site.

"Before nightfall, the rescue team will be able to get into the area," said Philippine army commander Lieutenant General Clemente Mariano.

But Gen. Mariano did not think the first bodies would be brought down until Thursday or Friday "because the area is inaccessible."

Ms. Soljeon, a medical doctor and member of a Christian char-

ity group that sent 80 volunteers up the mountain to aid in the search, said she would stay in San Roque awaiting news of her sister's fate.

She arrived two days ago after being told at the airport in Cagayan de Oro where she expected to pick up her sister Monday noon that the flight was missing.

Vehicles that brought frightened families to the village, the jumping off point for the search and rescue operation, lined the dirt roads here.

The mood in the makeshift camp was solemn, families having spent a shivering night praying for their loved ones despite word from rescuers that hopes of finding anyone alive in the wreckage had dimmed.

Frustrated at the lack of news coming from the 2,234 metre

mountain, some relatives of passengers on Flight 387 gathered backpack supplies and prepared to climb to the crash site and the eastern side of the summit.

Relatives also criticised the search operation as being poorly organised, with too little government support.

"It is so pathetic," said Ms. Soljeon of government search efforts.

"These people who are coming are more private citizens. How I wish there were more government agencies," involved in the search, she said.

Radio reports coming from searchers in the dense mountain jungle were poor, observers noted.

A total of 534 soldiers, police and civilian volunteers, including some relatives of the pas-

sengers, were converging on the crash site Wednesday, many having spent a cold and wet Tuesday night camped on the mountain and were preparing to do so again Wednesday.

Flight 387 was carrying 99 passengers and five crew when it crashed.

Hopes of finding any survivors faded Tuesday after airline officials withdrew a statement that 15 people may have survived.

Four foreigners were among the 104 people on board including one Japanese, an Austrian, an Australian and one from Switzerland.

Listed among the 99 passengers was Japanese national Toru Nagata, 26, of Kyoto, an anthropologist who worked for the Japan International Cooperation Agency.

Philippine television showed a tearful Michiko Nagata, her 62-year-old local bureau chief husband Masayoshi, and their youngest son, Hiroshi, 21, being met by local officials at Cagayan de Oro airport.

Reports said Mr. Nagata was due to return to Japan in March at the end of his teaching assignment.

The Nagatas were expected to join hundreds of other relatives in their vigil as search teams worked their way towards the wreckage of the stricken DC-9, which came down Monday in dense jungle on the side of rugged Mount Sumagaya.

Aerial reconnaissance throughout Tuesday suggested there were no survivors from Flight 387, making it the Philippines' worst aviation disaster.

Army snubs rebel offer to search for victims

CLAVERIA, Philippines (AFP) — Military officials Wednesday snubbed an offer by Communist rebels to assist in the search for 104 passengers of a Philippine jet that crashed in this jungle covered mountain area.

"We are capable of the search and rescue operation," on our own, responded Major General Santos Gabison, who is in charge of military search teams here, when asked if he would allow the rebels to join.

Communist rebels reportedly called a local radio station and the office of the mayor of Claveria earlier Wednesday to offer to help with the search saying they were "more familiar with the area."

The area around Mount Sumagaya where the Cebu Pacific Air Flight 387 plane crashed Monday is dotted with pockets of Communist rebel activity.

Though the government and Communist rebels are engaged in peace talks there are still reports of sporadic clashes between the two.

Nearly 550 soldiers, police and civilian volunteers are searching for the victims of the downed jet in the jungle covered mountain terrain in the southern Philippines.

Dallaire to testify on warcrimes in Rwanda

ARUSHA, Tanzania (AFP) — Canada's General Romeo Dallaire, who headed U.N. forces in Rwanda in 1994, will this month testify before the U.N. warcrimes court trying suspects held responsible for the genocide of that year, the tribunal announced Wednesday.

Gen. Dallaire is to testify in Arusha on Feb. 23 as a defence witness in the case of Jean-Paul Akayesu, a former mayor accused of the murder of thousands of Tutsis in his central Rwandan district of Taba between April and July 1994.

The U.N. court was set up by the Security Council in November 1994 to seek out and try those held mainly responsible for genocide and warcrimes, in which between 500,000 and 800,000 minority Tutsis and moderates of the Hutu majority were massacred by Hutu government troops and extremist militias.

Jean-Paul Akayesu has been charged with both genocide and crimes against humanity.

Gen. Dallaire's testimony is keenly awaited. On Jan. 13, U.N. Secretary General Kofi

Annan partially lifted diplomatic immunity bestowed on Gen. Dallaire — who had warned in 1994 of an impending ethnic catastrophe — to allow him to appear before the international tribunal.

Mr. Annan specified that the hearing should not be transformed into a trial of U.N. peacekeeping operations in Rwanda and the governments involved.

The U.N. Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) has been accused of failing to stop the genocide, which was sparked when a plane carrying President Juvenal Habyarimana was shot down in Kigali on April 6, 1994.

The U.N. mission had already been put under great strain in 1993 by a fragile accord between a Tutsi rebel force and the Hutu regime of the time.

Two trials are due to resume on Feb. 9 before the Arusha court, which has faced major logistical problems for two years and has come in for criticism for failing to proceed faster.

61 sperm whales dead after pod of 65 beaches in Australia

HOBART, Australia (AFP) — Sixty-one sperm whales have died after a pod of 65 beached themselves on the west coast of Tasmania, the state's Parks and Wildlife Services Director Max Kitchell said Wednesday.

The whales, some up to 15 metres long and weighing 41 tonnes, came ashore late Tuesday at Ocean Beach, near Strahan.

Two have been saved and were late Wednesday swimming beyond the breakers.

A barge was brought to the beach and towed the massive creatures clear.

Mr. Kitchell said there was no certainty the two would survive the trauma of the beaching and rescue, or would not meander back into the shallows.

The remaining two are still alive, but trapped in shallow water and with rough seas no further attempts to move them would be made Wednesday.

"All we can do is hope they stay alive until the morning, when we can try to get them out to sea," he said.

Apart from digging trenches in the sand to ensure they remained in water as the tide receded, there was little the team of Parks and Wildlife officers, veterinarians and scientists could do.

For the two that were rescued, officers brought in a four-wheeled drive tractor with a grading blade covered in layers of hessian from land and a barge by sea.

As the tractor pushed, the barge pulled a rope attached to each whale's tail fluke.

It took about 10 minutes for each to be push-pulled into deeper water.

Mr. Kitchell said the whales were clearly traumatised by



An aerial view of the sixty-five sperm whales that beached themselves onto Ocean Beach located in north-western Tasmania (Reuters photo)

their rescue.

"They were thrashing about and making clicking sounds," he said.

"But there was nothing else we could do. The only alternative was to sit and watch them die. It was worth a go."

"It was like trying to pull a lorry out of quicksand." There are no theories yet as to why the pod came ashore but Ocean Beach is notorious for whale strandings.

Seven years ago, more than 70 smaller pilot whales beached themselves there.

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Priority for the law

THE GOVERNMENT'S foot-dragging on the implementation of last week's ruling by the High Court of Justice on the unconstitutionality of the temporary Press and Publications Law is indeed without a precedent in our new democratic age. The government has offered all sorts of ill-conceived excuses to explain its reluctance to give full faith and credit to the court's historic decision and by doing so it has not given us an example in applying the rule of law. The minister of state for information affairs, Samir Mutawi, has tried to explain the recent confiscation of all copies of Hawadeth Al Sa'a weekly on the shallow ground that the government has yet to be informed officially of the court's judgement. If there is ever a weak excuse, this particular one is.

The minister should be the first to acknowledge that the other branches of governments take "judicial notice" of court verdicts immediately and should not wait till the bureaucratic process runs its course. When an important decision is adopted by the highest court of the land, the Executive Authority may obtain an immediate copy of such a decision if it so chooses in order to acquaint itself with all its fine points. It is unacceptable to state now, more than a week on the adoption of the court's decision, that the government has yet to be informed officially of its existence and content.

It also stands to legal reason that once a law is ruled unconstitutional, everything that was taken on its basis also falls ipso facto. According to the all-too-familiar legal dictum, everything based on a null-and-void law is also null and void.

The other excuse that the government has floated to frustrate respect for the court's decision is the untenable legal argument that the ruling has no retroactive effect. This is a post-hoc legal reasoning that no jurist worth his salt would even think of, much less act on its basis.

Likewise, the tendency by the government to circumvent the ruling, by "appealing" or submitting it to the Judicial Council for reconsideration, is also untenable and should not have been raised in the first place. The judiciary is the final arbiter of all legal issues and once the highest court of the country passes judgement on an issue, its decision becomes final and not subject to any form of reconsideration by any authority.

Any thought to the contrary risks undermining the primacy of the judicial function of the government. The government would be well-advised to take the ruling on the press law in a good spirit and accept the fact that it may have erred in adopting the controversial amendment in a manner that contrary to the letter and spirit of the organic law of the land.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Dustour's Jihad Momani Wednesday said that while the U.S. is preparing to wage war on Iraq for allegedly not complying with U.N. resolutions and possessing weapons of mass destruction, it is condoning and actually helping Israel to follow a similar policy and defy the world community. Israel is continually threatening the Arabs and Iran with aggression, maintains a formidable arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, continues to occupy Arab territories in defiance of the U.N. and escapes all forms of sanctions, noted the writer. In contrast, Iraq has implemented U.N. resolutions, its forces were expelled from Kuwait and it is threatening no neighbour, he said. The writer said that in light of the U.S. behaviour, all the Arabs, including the enemies of President Saddam Hussein, are unanimous in opposing any U.S. aggression on Iraq, and if such military action is carried out the Islamic movements will gain ground and Islamic suicidal attacks are bound to return to the scene. The writer warned that even the oppressed Iraqis and those who oppose the Iraqi leader will feel forced to support their president and defend their homeland in the face of foreign aggression.

Al Arab Al Yawm's Riham Farra criticised the government for confiscating weekly tabloids which appeared on the newsstands Tuesday, saying the measure was a violation of the ruling handed down by the Higher Court of Justice. The court ruled against the temporary amendments to the 1993 Press and Publications Law not because it opposes the government's policies but in line with the requirements of democracy, Ms. Farra said. She said the government is playing a losing game with the court, adding that it is expected to seek a legal interpretation of the law, or resubmit the same amendments to the law to Parliament. According to Ms. Farra the government stands a poor chance of gaining support from the deputies. It is more sensible for the government to allow the Ministry of Information and the Press and Publications Department to admit that they were wrong in confiscating the weeklies and allow them to publish in implementation of the court's ruling, Ms. Farra said. She said the government is in an unenviable situation and has no alternative but to comply with the court's ruling.

View from Academia

States that could turn the volatile Mideast around

AS THE likelihood of a U.S.-led strike against Iraq increases daily, the fear of a new Gulf war (a mini-war at least) is beginning to spread, with some countries in the region already taking precautions and preparations in case of possible attacks (not only against Iraq itself but also, probably, against Israel and any other country that gets involved) or possible side-effects of sorts (energy and food shortages, refugees on border crossings, etc.) — we know the old scenario all too well.

But as fear of conflict escalates, one cannot but think of how volatile the situation in the Middle East really is, despite the deceptive periodic calmness and the apparent stability. There are in today's Middle East, of course, many problems which stand in the way of the sort of stability, safety and prosperity which we all desire: economic, social, political, ecological, etc.

With respect to individual countries, there are, in many still, the problems of freedom and democracy, human rights, distribution of basic services; there are also the matters of privatisation, of better handling of development, of effective management, of better investment climates, of pursuit of quality, of elimination of harmful bureaucracy, etc.; and there are, in some, the growing threat of terrorism, border tensions, sovereignty, etc.

As for the area in general, there are serious problems still with regard to good neighbourliness, coordination of efforts, implementation of mutual agreements, cooperation, distribution of water shares, protection of the environment, facilitation of border procedures, etc.

These problems, or most of them, are not peculiar to the Middle East, of course. Most are global in fact. Eventually, these problems can be dealt with effectively and eliminated. One learns important lessons from other countries (Japan, Korea, Singapore, etc.) which have been able, in record times, to overcome many of the problems and impediments to progress from which we still suffer.

What is peculiar to the Middle East (and what stands in the way of stability and prosperity at the immediate level) is the destabilising effects stemming from three important countries in it — the three I's: Iraq, Iran, and Israel. Something, in other words, has to be done by way of enabling these countries to play a more constructive, positive role than they do at present — and not a subversive, destructive one.

With respect to the first (Iraq), the confrontation with the U.N./U.S. has really taken too long. The victims have been the Iraqi people (children, women, and men). Their suffering is real, and it ought not to be prolonged. As for the U.N. inspection missions, 8 years should have been sufficient to determine the type and extent of weapons which Iraq has in its possession. The longer the inspection missions last, the more tension there will be. What is required now is the working out, with the sincere efforts of both Iraq and the U.N./U.S., of an ultimatum which brings the matter to an end sooner than later. A diplomatic solution is not only safer and less costly than a military one, but it is (in my opinion) more effective. Iraq has much to offer to the region and the world, not only with respect to natural resources but also with respect to human resources. Everything ought to be done to enable it to contribute positively to the stability, progress, and prosperity of the region.

Iran is equally important. Its positive, constructive role has been curtailed and curbed for two decades. It also has a good deal to offer, through its rich natural resources, its valuable human resources, and its strategic location. Now that its new, emerging leadership is beginning to send signals that it wants to cooperate and contribute in a positive, constructive way, such signals ought to be capitalised upon. Sooner or later (sooner than later, I hope) Iraq and Iran will be given the opportunity to contribute to the region's development and progress more than they do at present. The real challenge, however, is to bring Israel to do so.

There was a time (during the last days of the Rabin-Peres era) when Israel seemed to be determined to bring peace to the region by implementing agreements signed with Arab parties, especially with the Palestinians, and by actively seeking to sign agreements with other Arab neighbours (Syria and Lebanon). Not only this but there was much talk about normalisation of relations with Israel, about Israel's economic role, and about its overall contribution to the region. As for today, not only have hopes of Israel's constructive role darkened immensely, but Israel is seen by almost everyone in the region as the most destabilising and threatening force to the peoples of the region and to their aspirations. How can you talk about a stable Middle East when Israel still occupies (and builds settlements in) Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese lands — i.e., when it is still an occupier? How can there be stability when Israel possesses and develops weapons of mass destruction? How can there be real stability and prosperity in the region when Israel (at least a big portion of its population) is isolationist, selfish and chauvinistic in its attitude? One can only hope that the present tension with Iraq will yield constructive, not destructive results. We want the whole (not part) of the Middle East region free from weapons of mass destruction. We want the three I's not only to cease to be sources of tension but also to start to be real assets to the region's development, progress and prosperity.

Lessons must be learned from what has happened or what is likely to happen: tension, confrontation, arrogance, stubbornness, etc. lead only to disaster; open-mindedness, reason, common-sense, and goodwill lead to understanding and peace. There are lessons for all those involved (directly or indirectly) in the present tension in the Middle East (as well as for those who were directly or indirectly involved in the last Gulf war).

This, of course, includes Israel which ought to have come to the realisation (and if it has not, it ought to now) that real security and stability for Israel lies not in keeping lands which do not belong to it, not in building settlements, and (certainly) not in masks against potential nuclear, chemical or biological weapons, but in making peace and in living and letting live. This is also what the three I's need to realise and sincerely work for.

Moreover, we in the Middle East want more from the U.N./U.S. than helping us free the region from weapons of mass destruction; we want implementation of peace agreements, the establishment of full (warm) peace, and the pursuit of economic strength and prosperity. The heroes we champion are those who help us bring peace and stability to all of the Middle East region, and not to a small portion of it.

Normalisation facing societal, political obstacles

By Alia A. Toukan
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN - Three years since the signing of the Jordan-Israel peace treaty, most Jordanians still find the idea of genuine peace making with the Jewish state a difficult one to grasp.

The optimism felt by some following the launch of the Madrid Middle East peace process in 1991 and the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty of 1994 has dissipated, say analysts.

Although only three years old, the normalisation process between Jordan and Israel — a problematic term for many here, both in respect to its definition and its application — has failed to change a significant number of Jordanians' attitudes towards Israelis, both for external political and internal societal reasons.

The intransigence of Israel's present Likud-led government and the clear standstill on the Palestinian-Israeli track are the factors most analysts attribute to Jordanians' unchanged perceptions towards the Jewish state, fed by decades of hatred and hostilities.

Others, however, see an added internal "societal dimension" of equal significance to understanding the lack of acceptance shown by many Jordanians to normal ties with Israelis.

The underlying "fear of peace" is the most obvious obstacle to normalisation of relations between the two peoples.

"I don't want to meet Israelis or have normal relations with them. I fear that if I get to know them and they prove to be nice, everything I grew up believing about them will have to be questioned," says an administrative clerk at the University of Jordan.

This sentiment is often aired when people face the reality of having to deal with former enemies turned "friends," according to sociologists and psychologists.

One psychologist, speaking on condition of anonymity, says there is a particularity to Jordanian popular perceptions of Israel, which further complicates matters.

"As much as we mistrust them, we fear them. We fear they will not give us our rights, and that they are stronger than us," he says. "We fear that we are not equipped enough to deal with them. Our own incompetence and insecurities add to this fear and make us want to ignore them and pretend they don't exist."

A recent poll conducted by the Centre for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan showed that over 80 per cent of Jordanians still view Israel as the enemy. Although many in the Kingdom were not surprised by the findings, some believe that this should serve as a wake-up call to both the Jordanian and Israeli governments.

For University of Jordan sociologist Musa Shtewi, the percentage may be a referendum against the peace process in general, rather than a reflection of people's individual stand vis-a-vis peace with Israel.

"You can be pro-peace with the Israelis, but still view them as the enemy based on their behaviour with the Palestinians and the lack of respect they have shown to Arabs," he says.

Likewise, some Jordanians deem themselves pro-peace with Israel, but still oppose normalisation.

"I am for peace, but am not willing to have normal relations with them like buying Israeli products," said a 30-year-old, Western-educated woman.

More significantly in the eye of Dr. Shtewi, is that a historic opportunity has been missed for peace making between Israel and Jordan. "There was a very strong momentum for peace in Jordan after the

signing of the treaty and the initial Israeli pullback from the Gaza Strip and Jericho. People believed that there might be a genuine desire by Israelis for peace and for changing its behaviour in the region."

"But this momentum was lost following the incursion into Lebanon in April 1996, the Qana massacre, and the election of [Benjamin] Netanyahu in May 1996. It is going to be very hard to regain it again."

For many others normalisation is simply a non-issue. The Islamic Action Front (IAF), spearheading the popular opposition campaign against ties with Israel, says the Middle East peace process in its entirety must be questioned.

"Is there really such a thing as a peace process right now that talk of normalisation should even come up?" asks IAF Secretary General Abdul Latif Arabiyat. "In principle, we are for peace. But where is the peace, and who is it between?"

"In terms of religion, we have no enmity with the Jews. But we do have an enmity with those Jews who have occupied our land. The issue is one of rights, and the displacement of people from their homes and land, and the failure of the peace process," he says.

While a very vocal and active anti-peace camp of Islamists, communists, Arab nationalists, and independents, has emerged and is working to peacefully scuttle the treaty, there has been a negligible corresponding pro-peace movement mobilising support.

"The problem is that commitment among those in the pro-peace camp is not as strong as those who are opposed to it," says Dr. Shtewi. "They are not vocal and don't fight back because of the political realities."

According to Dr. Shtewi, the majority of Jordanians are not ideologically opposed to peace with Israel. They are for what he calls "conditional normalisation" — normalisation if there are changes with regards to Israeli treatment of the Palestinians, and movement on all tracks of the peace process.

This, however, is disputed by a former cabinet minister who requested anonymity. "In the Arab and Jordanian psyche, people don't like to deal with Israel unless they have to," he says.

"There is a real psychological barrier that might be ideologically-based. The whole education system and 50 years of conflict and enmity are not easy to erase. The problem is less acute with the younger generations, but it still exists," he adds.

But what gives opponents of normalisation more ammunition, say analysts, is the arrogance with which the present Likud government has ploughed ahead with its policies of aggression, intimidation and discrimination towards the Palestinian people.

While the exact figure is unknown, many of Jordan's 4.2 million population are of Palestinian origin who were forced to flee their homes in successive Arab-Israeli wars.

Most have family members living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and are enraged by continuing scenes of mistreatment of Palestinians by the Israeli government and army as well as by Israeli citizens, the confiscation of Arab land, and new settlement projects, and are frustrated by the long-delayed implementation of the Oslo accords.

According to the psychologist such factors make it difficult for those in the pro-peace camp to "whole heartedly preach peace with Israel."

Reports of alleged bad-treatment and harassment of Jordanians at crossing points and at Israel's embassy do little to ameliorate the image many Jordanians have of Israelis. Analysts say such incidents add to

popular resentment towards the Jewish state and its people.

The social stigma

With the exception of a handful of businesspersons openly working with Israelis, most Jordanians who advocate relations with Israel do so with caution and in private circles.

The social stigma of having any contact with Israelis is a genuine obstacle to normalisation of ties. This problem becomes even more acute within intellectual circles, among academics, journalists, and professionals, according to Dr. Shtewi.

Even in officialdom, this stigma is ever present.

"There is a built-in popular position here that any government, whether collectively or individually, including acting ministers, is uneasy to go against. After all, the ministers and officials are part of the belief-system of the society," says the former minister.

The psychologist points to what he sees as a cultural element to such behaviour. "People here shy away from expressing opinions or preferences that are not in conformity with what the majority is thinking."

He adds, however, that the social stigma factor has become an excuse for some people reluctant to normalise. "It is used by people who don't have a problem dealing with Israelis on principle, but don't see much value [to] it in light of the political situation."

The position of associations

The role of the 80,000 member-strong professional associations, who are fighting hard to halt normalisation, cannot be ignored. Although the government intends to regulate association and union activities, present membership laws impose strict guidelines on the concerned professionals. These extend to any affiliation a member might have with Israelis.

Proponents of these rules defend the jurisdiction of professional organisations saying that the committees who draft such rules are elected by the association memberships and reflect public sentiment, especially in relation to normalisation.

According to the analysts, the ire of the associations and the noise they make when nearly anyone, members or otherwise, have bad contact with the "Zionist enemy" is enough to force people with Israeli contacts into secrecy, and to discourage others who might have considered such contacts.

A case in point was the Jordanian Press Association (JPA) statement condemning the visit of five journalists to Israel last month "as a form of normalisation."

"Intellectual terrorism" cried the headline of Sbihaan Chief Editor Raja Talab's column. In his popular weekly tabloid, Mr. Talab said the JPA move was in contradiction to the profession of journalism which advocates freedom of speech.

Association pressure nearly put art gallery proprietor Isam Nseirat out of business. An artist himself and head of the Jordanian Society for Culture and International Peace, Mr. Nseirat hosted an Israeli exhibit at his Amman gallery in 1996.

A year later the Jordanian Artists Association launched a boycott of the gallery.

"Peace is a battle, I never realised it, but now I do," he says.

The absence of dialogue

Mr. Nseirat's attempts to open a dialogue with those in the anti-normalisation camp were rejected, he says.

Dr. Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh

"Why aren't they willing to have a dialogue? In Jordan people's reaction is just to boycott," he says.

According to Dr. Shtewi, "there is no objective debate about the normalisation issue. The two sides of the normalisation camp just shout at each other."

He adds that the anti-peace camp is highly vocal, and attaches labels to people, so those who may have once been willing to enter such debates have opted to avoid the hassle.

"Because it is not a rational and logical debate, you can't get into it. It is 'sharshaha,' he says, using the Arabic word implying a humiliating mêlée.

There is practically no escaping this phenomenon, say experts.

"The mode of thinking that existed 40 or 50 years ago still exists, and even our intellectuals still talk on the emotional level," the psychologist says.

For him, the debate concerning the normalisation issue is dominated either by the pro-government line of policy or the ideological oppositions.

Still, he says, "those in the government are not able to present their case very well, as they themselves are not convinced of their arguments."

In addition, many observers believe that since the peace treaty, successive governments have been forcing normalisation on Jordanians and have stifled most public debate on the issue, a charge denied by officials.

"The government should allow both sides to air their views — whether pro or anti-peace. It would further rationalise the debate and render the opposition camp reaction less extreme," says the psychologist.

Peace dividends deficit

The 1994 promises of economic dividends to help Jordanians accept the treaty have failed to materialise and thus has increased popular resentment, say analysts.

"If anything, tourism and standards of living have declined since the treaty," says the former minister.

Dr. Arabiyat insists that lack of any tangible results "speaks for itself and for the failure of the process."

According to Israeli Ambassador to Amman Oded Eran, "obviously expectations were created, rightly or wrongly, that were very high. Some of these expectations, I think, have been met, some of them are still in the process of being dealt with. We should not forget that we are dealing with a period of only three years."

Jordan's growing impatience with Mr. Netanyahu's policies has been made more apparent. His Majesty King Hussein has become unusually critical of Mr. Netanyahu's policies.

King Hussein, who campaigned hard to convince sceptical Arab leaders to give Mr. Netanyahu the benefit of the doubt after his election in May 1996, has squarely blamed the Israeli premier for the faltering peace process.

As for opposition to normalisation, Dr. Arabiyat insists that it will continue despite the Nov. 4 election of a predominantly pro-government parliament after the Islamist-led opposition boycotted the polls.

"The IAF works in accordance with the law and the Constitution. We will show our discontent with the peace treaty through public awareness campaigns, statements, lectures and the media," he says.

"We want what is in the country's interest, but we have a right to say the peace process has failed."

Society on the move

Signals from the physical and social scientists

IN A week of mounting regional tensions, ending here on the homefront with more than a quarter of our House deputies launching into a diatribe about the "evils" of the Orbit Arab Song Festival in a parliamentary session Wednesday, other developments were and will be leaving marks of import.

ENVIRONMENTAL HARMONY: As patron of the IUCN-The World Conservation Union, Her Majesty Queen Noor Tuesday will welcome participants to the second West/Central Asia and North Africa Regional Conservation Forum. The purpose of this gathering in Amman is to plan the programmes and activities in the targeted region aimed at safeguarding the environment and to establish strategic concepts and develop policies in an effort to bring the countries of this region together in addressing and combating their common environmental problems in harmony. The representatives of the 80-member states, government agencies, NGOs and specialised institutes and agencies from 24 countries will discuss issues related to protected areas, resource use management, environmental communication and education, and environmental laws. IUCN National Coordinator Alio Hatough-Bouran said the forum will be attended by IUCN Director General David McDowall, 10 senior IUCN staff members and around 150 members and commission members. Jordan is a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity and has just completed its Country Study on Biological Diversity which profiles the Kingdom's wealth of bioresources, focuses on the threats facing species, introduces management measures and suggests immediate action for remedy and rehabilitation of degraded ecosystems, said Dr. Hatough-Bouran. Jordan's IUCN National Committee comprises the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and the Environment, The Royal Society for the

Conservation of Nature, The Jordan Environment Society, The University of Jordan, The Jordanian Society for Desertification Control and Badia Development, The Higher Council for Science and Technology, Petra National Trust, Friends of Archaeology, and the Arab Women's Organisation.

IN-HOUSE MOVES:

In keeping with its tradition of seeking to promote from within, the Royal Scientific Society has appointed Seyfeddin Muaz as its new vice president. Dr. Muaz, a civil engineer, actually began his career at RSS in 1975 as head of the Building Technology Division of the Building Materials Research Centre. At the time he held a B.Sc. and M.Sc. from the Middle East Technical University in Ankara. In 1977 he was awarded a four-year scholarship from the U.S. Agency for International Development to pursue a Ph.D. at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, where former RSS president, now Minister of Industry, Trade and Supply Hani Mulki earned his doctorate as well. Dr. Muaz, 50, returned in 1983 to his earlier position and moved up the ladder to become director of the Building Research Centre and then deputy vice president and advisor to the president of the RSS. With an expertise in structures, he has consulted on the analysis and design of earthquake resis-



Seyfeddin Muaz

tant buildings in Jordan, and published a paper on codes, standards and specifications regarding the reconstruction of Palestine.

WHICH WAY TO GO? It has been confirmed that the director of the national news agency, Petro, Abdullah Etoum has indeed been approached as a candidate for the post of secretary general of the Ministry of Information Affairs, the seat vacated by the death last month of Mohammad Amin. Mr. Etoum, it appears, has grown quite fond of his current assignment, let alone Petro where he has spent nearly his entire career in journalism. Therefore it is uncertain whether he will take up the new offer.

NEW DIGS: The Office of IIRH Crown Prince Hassan will welcome Mahmoud Mufit on board the staff there. Mr. Mufit, who has been with the Institute of Inter-faith Studies for about two years, will be "still inter-faithing" but from a new venue. He will become inter-faith coordinator for the Office of the Crown Prince.

A PENCHANT FOR HISTORY: In Jordan for a visit, en route to the annual conference of the Arab Thought Forum in Abu Dhabi is Washington-based economist Mohammad Rabi'e. Dr. Rabi'e is completing the writing of two books. The first, in Arabic, deals with the process of history and the Arab future. He will lecture on this subject on Tuesday at Nadi Al Faiha in Shmeisoni near the police station at 7:00 p.m. The second book, in English, is to be entitled The Structure of

Human Progress. Therein, Dr. Rabi'e said he has developed a new theory to explain human history and how societies developed over time. He said the theory could establish a new paradigm in social thinking. His trip to the Middle East included an earlier stop in Germany where he met with officials at Exfut University to discuss the development of an international studies programme and the possible establishment of a European university overseas. He said, at present the officials were looking at Jordan. Dr. Rabi'e is accompanied by his wife Maha who works for Voice of America. The couple will travel to the West Bank today and return for another week's stay in Jordan before heading for Abu Dhabi.

LECTURE ON PROGRESS: Spanish architect Ignacio Arce, who has been directing the restoration works at the Umayyad Palace of Amman — aspects of which have met with controversy among archaeologists (so what's new?) — will lecture, in English, on Urban Development of the Amman Citadel, tonight (Thursday) at the Instituto Cervantes. He will talk about discoveries at the Citadel of urban settlement and similarities to the Hispano-Muslim urban development.

SALUT L'ARTISTE: February is Black History Month in the U.S. which means commemoration of the efforts and achievements of African Americans. The American Center in Amman thus is hosting a series of cultural events featuring poetry readings, Worldnet dialogues, lectures, films and exhibits at the center in the U.S.

Jennifer Hamarneh

We're not there yet chip talk

By Jean-Claude Elias

IN THE last three or four years, ink-jet colour printers (IJC) have made huge progress. While their technical characteristics and capabilities were "going up" at lightning speed, their prices have been reduced beyond expectation. The average IJC that now sells at about JD300 in Jordan is capable of producing amazing colour printout at the rate of one page per minute. High resolution, combined with the new chemical formulation of the colour ink now allows the SOHO (small office — home office) user to obtain nearly photographic quality results, provided one uses the special paper usually supplied by the printer's manufacturer. Strong with their recent technical and sales achievements in terms of IJC, Epson and Hewlett-Packard, leaders in the field, are proposing a set of tools that allows users to handle photographs from capture to printout. Shoot with a digital camera (about JD700), process with a Pentium PC and finally print on an IJC. Without even going to the lab for processing or photo-finishing. It's simple and it works. But how good is the result? Can it be compared to what one could achieve with a high-end traditional camera like a Nikon, Canon or Minolta, with chemical lab processing? Currently there is still a noticeable

able difference in picture quality when we compare a good lab-processed Nikon shot with a home-processed PC digital picture. When it comes to art even the slightest difference in quality can be important. If on the other hand we take into consideration that the whole DIY (do it yourself) home process was unthinkable only five years ago, and that it is being improved every six months, it becomes possible to foresee the near future. We may be able to reach professional quality, digital home photo processing in three to five years. Even with its current less-than-perfect technical quality home digital photography presents many advantages compared to the traditional system. You do not need to buy films (sorry Kodak, Fuji, Konica, ...) for a digital camera. You can also modify your shots at taste, changing the colour balance, the contrast, the cropping, and so forth. Finally you do not have to wait for the result — you can print any time you want and as many copies as you wish on your home IJC. Those who have worked in a photo lab know the pleasure to have complete control on the whole photographic process, from taking the picture to printing it. This could become available and affordable to the masses very soon.

Early learning — A missed opportunity?

By Richard Tanaer

PLAYING WITH my two-year-old grandson Alex during my holidays in England set me thinking about the educational advantages enjoyed by such a child today: lots of books; in colour with pop-ups and fold-downs adding excitement to interest; musical toys, constructional toys, toys to manipulate and others to focus attention; clothes with labels or pictures; videos and computer games, all things designed to stimulate young minds. Outside his home too are further opportunities for early learning: parent-and-toddler groups meeting for youngsters to get used to one another, essential now that most families contain just one or two children, and for parents to exchange information. More expensive are nurseries, where trained staff develop children's abilities and allow parents to return to work knowing their children are in good hands. Around every corner there seems to be another park for kiddies to play, while many shops have designated play areas. As well as children's books and toys, the public library has activities and story-time for pre-schoolers, whilst the local swimming pools have spaces restricted for accompanying baby and toddler swimming, plus a creche offering child-care while parents swim. In two more years, Alex will gradually be inducted into school by teachers and assistants trained in nursery-infant education. Given the resources of both home and community, he should get off to a good start in school. But how far can the average Jordanian child match this grounding? Will s/he start reading from exciting books, or have to make do with a few dull grey, poorly printed stories (or expensive, culturally-different imports)? But why should this

be? The Arab World represents an enormous market, some of it very prosperous, so why, with high birth rates guaranteeing the market, isn't there a Macmillan's or a Longman's focusing on the junior market? Using computer-aided design, books can be turned out cheaply and well, even in small batches. So where is the Arab initiative and enterprise for this rewarding business? Toys may present more of a problem; most in the local shops are either expensive imports from the West or cheaper over from the Far East. But given the craft skills of Jordan — some woven, glassware and wooden touristic products already resemble toys — shouldn't local toy-making be successful? One finds educational toys of cloth or wood in parts of Africa and South Asia, so why can't ones designed for our children be made here? Though the larger family size here in Jordan seems to preclude playgroups and nurseries, the poverty of some areas and the smaller families of the rich suggest that they are needed. Whilst its true that educational games do not have to be complex or expensive, and that older children can make games for and with younger family members, trained group leaders understanding Piaget or Bruner's principles can teach children extra and vital skills and concepts. They may spot retardation due to deafness or other physical handicaps quicker than parents seeing their children everyday, or develop methods to combat social or psychological weaknesses. Young ones may blossom in playgroups, ones who may be cramped by big brothers or sisters and daring or neglectful parents. Far from belittling the very real strengths of the extended Arab family, I wonder if missed opportunities aren't lost forever by children who never mix with other families and who are never coached by

professionals. Certainly that seemed to disadvantage most farmworkers' children in the village where I was brought up. Childhood comes once only and, with more young children joining our schools without adequate hygiene or eating standards, children unable to communicate who are totally unsocialised, the case for pre-school preparation is strengthened. And if this is the situation in a highly privileged school, how much worse must it be elsewhere? Though, I can never be an advocate of the "get 'em into nursery school so I can go back to my job" version of equal opportunity, I do feel that properly run playgroups and nurseries help most children's early development and probably their parents too. As more and more high-rise flats block the skyline of Tla-Al-Ali, I find just one play park and that is way down the hill from where I live. Where are children of this area to play and exercise, especially at weekends and in holidays? The streets are becoming too dangerous, the open spaces fast vanishing. Most schools have woefully little play areas around them. Do our children have screaming in stairwells and becoming TV couch potato heads as their main choices? Arabs are caring and loving of their children, taking them everywhere they go, but where is there to go apart from family and some eating places? Where are the pre-school play groups and nurseries, the clubs and societies for youngsters, the children's libraries and play centres? All too few though 30 per cent of our population is under 10 years of age. We know how quickly children learn to walk and talk; shouldn't they be able to read and compute, make music and play sports, socialise and cooperate just as quickly. The issue of early learning needs addressing.

'No more bets please,' Turkey tells gamblers

By Daren Butler Reuters

ISTANBUL — Turkey's casinos have hit a losing streak and no run of luck can save them from being cleaned out at last. Gamblers must place their last legal bets before Feb. 11, when a parliament-ordered ban goes into effect, pulling the plug on a sector worth well over \$1 billion and employing 18,000 people. The closure marks a victory for members of parliament who approved the ban last year over worries about the effects of gambling on family life and allegations of casinos being used for money laundering. But the only real winners, the casino industry warns, will be illegal operators eager to capitalise on the considerable local passion for roulette, blackjack and poker. The tourism industry will be the big loser, they argue. A last minute bid by the industry to save the country's 78 casinos failed in the constitutional court on Jan. 21, and the closure order is set to go into effect. Punters continued to flock to Istanbul's casinos during the weekend after the court ruling, hoping for a last big

score before authorities seize the 8,800 slot machines and 850 gaming tables across the country. "Underworld will take over" Frustrated casino operators say the ban will only play into the hands of those targeted by the authorities in the first place. "This will not be the end of gambling in Turkey by any means," Erhan Akbulut, chairman of the Turkish Gaming Operators' Association, told Reuters. "The underworld will take over, there will be no controls and no financial contribution to the treasury." Akbulut said casinos added about \$100 million to treasury coffers and swelled tourism revenues substantially — as they were intended to do when they were first authorised in 1983. Concerns about the alleged use of casinos in laundering money from the massive heroin trade played a key role in the move to shut casinos. The government also cited concerns about the impact of gambling on family life after media reports of suicides and family hardship linked to unpaid gambling debts. The bill was initially proposed by

the former Islamist-led coalition under Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan. Now the casinos look set to share the fate of Erbakan, whose Welfare party was closed down by the constitutional court in Jan. During his stormy year in power, Erbakan described casinos as "spreading to every corner of Turkey like an illness." His secularist successors pressed ahead with the draft. The sector fell under a sinister spotlight in July 1996 after the gangland killing of "casino king" Omer Latif Topal, owner of one of the country's five major gaming groups. The media said he was gunned down in a battle over laundered money. Policemen, former bodyguards of a right-wing MP in Erbakan's government, were charged with his murder in an ongoing case tied to a broader scandal linking state officials with the mafia.

Casino closures a heavy blow for tourism The president of the Turkish Hoteliers' Association, Ali Gureli, said the closure order was a heavy blow to the tourism sector and hotels in particular, warning foreign investors would seek considerable compensation. Casinos were an integral part of five-star hotels when they were built and already prompted a sharp decline in hotel bookings for this winter, he said. Anticipation of casinos closing has already prompted a sharp decline in hotel bookings for this winter, he said. Casino operators seek fresh opportunities abroad Casino and tourism sector officials expect the law to be overturned within two to three years as the government

Akbulut forecast tourist arrivals of around 10 million could fall by five percent because of the closures. Revenues from tourism, which total around \$7.5 billion, could fall much more because of the high level of expenditure by casino tourists. "There will be a material loss for Turkish tourism. Some hotels have been able to stay open during winter because of casino tourism, now they may not be able to," Akbulut said. Foreign gamblers represent about 20 percent of casino customers, mostly coming on tours from Russia and Israel, according to Turgay Alp, general secretary of the Mediterranean Hotel Operators' Union. He said the major southern resort of Antalya depended heavily on its 23 casinos and the shopping tourism they brought with them, especially during winter. Casino customers account for three to four percent of occupancy rates in five-star hotels, out of a total occupancy of 60 to 62 percent. Gureli said hotel income from casinos was very lucrative. "This is effectively the hotels' profit margin and if you take this away they will be suffering," he said.

recognises the industry's value, Akbulut said. Meanwhile, Turkey's loss will be a gain for casinos in central and eastern Europe, who are expected to welcome Turkish gamblers with open arms. The Turkish government should instead act to improve controls over casinos and reconsider earlier proposals to reorganise the sector, sector officials say. The tourism ministry previously considered plans to limit casinos to three designated areas, suggesting an island near Istanbul and various reasons as possible locations. The proposals were part of a reform process under which the ministry had imposed dress codes, restricted weekend opening hours and banned Turkish nationals from casinos. In the meantime, casino operators are seeking out fresh opportunities to establish operations outside Turkey. "Turkish casino operators have already begun to look abroad," Akbulut said. Turkish casino operators have already moved to establish operations in the breakaway northern Cypriot state, the Turkic republics of Central Asia and Eastern Europe.

Mulki: Government welcomes, encourages setting up chambers of industry throughout Kingdom

AMMAN (J.T.) — Industry, Trade and Supply Minister Hani Mulki said Wednesday that the government welcomes and encourages the creation of chambers of industry around the Kingdom as proposed in an initiative on the part of the society of investors at the Sahab Industrial Estate.

The society, which submitted the initiative to Dr. Mulki at a meeting held at the Ministry of Industry and Trade in the presence of the ministry's Secretary-General Mohammad Halaqa, called for the creation of an industrial committee that would work out a formula for the creation

of chambers of industry in Zarqa and the other governorates of Jordan.

The society called for the enactment of a modern law to govern and organize the function of the industrial sector in Jordan, help protect the sector's interests and help achieve the industrialists' aspirations.

It also suggested the creation of a federation that would group all chambers of industry and boost industrial production.

The Ministry of Industry and Trade supports the creation of a federation of Jordanian chambers of industry as soon as possible and will facilitate its activities.

said the minister at the meeting which was attended by representatives of industries at the Sahab Industrial Estate and Zarqa region.

He said the ministry has opened a dialogue among industrialists and will accept whatever is acceptable to the industrial sector as a whole, noting that the ministry has delayed the presentation of a law allowing the creation of chambers of industry for two months with a view to giving the industrialists sufficient time to discuss the issue among themselves.

Jamil Jubran, the society's president said that his society does not

oppose the creation of any chamber of industry in Zarqa or other areas and was only mediating between the industrialists in Amman and Zarqa to help them reach an agreement on the format and functions of the proposed federation.

Later Wednesday, the society's members held a separate meeting with industrialists from the Zarqa region to discuss procedures and mechanism for the creation of the Zarqa Chamber of Industry.

According to Mr. Jubran, the two sides have decided to create a committee to assume the task of reaching the required mechanism.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) You can't stand it when people beat around the bush. Today, all you'll have to do is ask! If you seem to be getting contradictory answers, don't back off. Just point that out and keep after it until you get the whole story. This could be very entertaining.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Your boss or an older person is in a generous mood. Watch out for one who wants to pay you with advice instead of cash, though. Don't take any IOUs. Meanwhile, value your sweetheart's advice highly. He or she can see something you're missing.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Ask a Libra friend out to dinner. If you don't have one, just ask the most attractive person you know. The combination with your sign and Libra is very complimentary. With your hyperactivity, you can both burn off those extra calories. Get out there and play!

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) Information from a private source might not be right. The person who's passing along the gossip got it from somebody else, and you know how those things go. You're pretty good at dishwashing, but you're not so good at passing on information you're not certain about. And don't pay much attention to anything you hear, either.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) If you don't have a marvellous time today, it's your own fault. Everyone you know will be enjoying themselves. It's an excellent day for group activities and meetings. Keep people focused on the subject at hand. Even big changes will be easy with the conditions that are in effect right now.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) You'll have to stay on your toes to keep ahead of the action today. Instead of getting frustrated, offer some guidance. You can figure out what the objective is, and the best route to get there. In other words, you're the navigator. Don't just sit there and be a passenger in life today.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) You may have to go farther than you expected to get what you want. If it's not available in the local stores, try checking the catalogues. Actually, it may not even have been invented yet. Not to worry. Things are changing so fast that it'll probably be here soon.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) If you don't have any investments, it's time you got some. Things are changing all around you. That's all the more reason to think about your security. Focus on long-term goals today. Otherwise, you're liable to spend everything you've got on something you want now. Resist the temptation.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) You're in for a very interesting day. Your competition has the advantage. Instead of getting into a fight you can't win, go into the situation with hat in hand. If you take this stance in a confrontational situation, you'll learn something valuable and make a good impression on the other person.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Somebody's trying to talk your car off. He or she wants to sell you something. There's only one thing to keep in mind. If this item is going to bring you more money, it's good. If it's going to cost you more money, it's bad. Make that clear and you'll shorten the conversation considerably.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You're attractive to a person whom you find attractive. The two of you might be able to get together for lunch or dinner. The conversation you get into could have interesting side effects. Something that starts out as a friendship could easily develop into more.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) There is change in the air. You're lucky, forceful and dynamic. You're also good-looking. So what have you got to worry about? Absolutely nothing! Make your life into what you've always wanted it to be. Toss out the whatever doesn't work and get on to whatever does. You know which is which.

Birthstone of February: Amethyst — Onyx

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Handle business this morning. This evening, you're going to want to relax at home. A nice meal, good music and perhaps a soak in the hot tub will make this a memorable Friday night. If your sweetheart has other plans, let him or her go without you. An occasional absence does make the heart grow fonder.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You're able to learn more quickly than usual. Information just sticks to your brain. So study something your boss or professor has been trying to teach you. A loved one can help. He or she may not have complete mastery of the subject yet, but the insights will be priceless.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) It's a good afternoon to go shopping, if you can find the energy. It looks like you'd rather just take off early on your weekend jaunt. That could prove more expensive than you'd planned. Better check on your motel reservations and other little details.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) It looks like you could pull off the deal of the century if you get insider information and tried something unusual. You might be able to wrangle an unconventional loan. If you don't have somebody helping you with a real estate deal, start investigating one. He or she will most likely be a Libra.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Your luck changes for the worse as your day progresses. There's a whole lot to do. Scan over your lists first thing this morning. Sort out those little pieces of paper in your pockets, too. A couple hours spent getting organized this morning could really save your bacon later in the day.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Conditions are boric this morning, but you'll get the most creative work done then. Meet with friends later in the day. A party would be a good way to relax and renew your energy. In fact, it's a good weekend to party, from tonight clear through Sunday.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) This is easy, but don't get lazy. You're going to have to perform up to the standards you've already set for yourself. Better check your calendar again. If you miss this meeting, you'll be in trouble. It looks like there might be quite a bit of money involved.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Conditions for travel look excellent through Sunday. How long has it been since you and your sweetheart had a romantic cruise? If you can't afford the Princess line, a sailboat will do. If you can't even manage a rowboat, don't let that stop you. There's some sort of cruising you can do this weekend.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) You and your partner had better have a meeting this morning. You're going to have to shell out some money later in the day, so you need to agree on priorities. If either of you spends the money without the other's approval, it could make the marital purchase impossible.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) If you push yourself hard this morning, you might get out early. It'll definitely be worth the effort. You work harder than three or four people most of the time, so why not allow yourself to relax harder than three or four people as well? Go for it.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You'd like to spend the whole day in fascinating conversation. Instead, you're going to have to take care of business. Consider the possibilities and make the best decision. It won't be easy, but it could bring you fame as well as fortune.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) This weekend you'll be even more romantic than usual. If you don't have a sweetheart, consider somebody you've always thought of as a good friend. There might be a difference in your ages, but that's OK. It's the level of communication that counts.

Birthstone of February: Amethyst — Onyx

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET											
HOUSING BANK CENTER AMMAN - SHARISANT											
TELEPHONE: 607171 / 607179											
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE LIST FOR WEDNESDAY 04/02/1998											
PAST 12 MONTHS HIGH	PAST 12 MONTHS LOW	COMPANY'S NAME	P / E	DIV.	NO. OF TRANS.	NO. OF SHARES	VALUE TRADED JD	OPEN PRICE	CLOSE PRICE	CHANGE	
346,000	250,000	ARAB BANK	15.1	1.22	12	1020	335240	328.00	329.00	1.00	+
2,340	1,600	JOR. NATIONAL BK.	8	0.00	14	11450	19888	1.72	1.74	.02	+
3,540	1,400	BANK OF JORDAN	4.3	0.00	5	1687	2995	1.40	1.37	-.03	-
1,300	890	MID. EAST INV. BK.	67.0	0.00	1	50	51	1.00	1.02	.02	+
2,480	1,450	INDUSTRIAL DEV. BK.	10.3	6.07	15	40350	68600	1.69	1.72	.03	+
5,300	4,610	THE HOUSING BK.	15.6	2.72	12	22654	11700	5.10	5.22	.12	+
4,180	1,850	JOR. KUNYAT BANK	10.5	0.00	5	1424	2800	2.00	1.97	-.03	-
570	1,620	JOR. GULF BANK	4.0	10.29	15	21472	14246	.69	.66	-.03	-
4,050	2,250	JOR. ISLAMIC BANK	11.8	4.16	7	2550	5923	2.34	2.31	-.03	-
BANK SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 232.54	%CHG: +0.37	66	102857	565997				
2,050	1,550	JOR. ELECTRIC PHW.	9.8	4.93	44	22700	45761	2.02	2.03	.01	+
1,950	930	NATL. PORTFOLIO	9	0.00	11	6000	6148	1.02	1.02	.00	+
1,590	1,150	MID. EAST HOTELS	18.4	0.00	5	750	903	1.20	1.21	.01	+
1,050	1,740	JORDAN EXPR. INV.	9	0.00	4	2050	3753	.95	.89	-.06	-
1,090	900	ZARQA EDUCATION	9	0.00	2	2250	2095	.95	.94	-.01	-
2,160	1,630	UNIFIED CO.	8.0	6.55	1	250	420	1.69	1.66	-.03	-
840	640	UNION LAM. DEV.	9	0.00	3	1000	630	.64	.63	-.01	-
SERVICE SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 116.87	%CHG: +0.03	70	35000	57708				
1,160	930	ATTANQUEER	9	0.00	3	4450	5127	1.16	1.15	-.01	-
4,450	2,750	JOR. CHEMIST FACT.	19.5	3.79	50	216723	630974	2.96	2.90	-.06	-
4,140	3,050	JOR. PROSPHATS MINES	10.1	2.74	7	5285	19026	3.60	3.65	.05	+
7,050	5,620	ARAB POTASH CO.	14.0	3.33	2	160	918	5.62	5.75	.13	+
11,160	9,200	JOR. PETROL. REFINERY	10.0	6.64	5	180	1482	10.29	10.29	.00	+
2,890	1,330	INDUSTRIAL COM. AGR.	9	0.00	3	527	709	2.34	1.35	-.01	-
4,700	3,400	ARAB PHARM. MANF.	12.1	4.55	44	9462	14560	4.37	4.40	.03	+
6,000	4,400	DAR ALPHAMA DEV. INV.	14.2	4.31	6	1300	7478	5.70	5.82	.12	+
620	430	LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	9.3	0.00	21	9150	3937	.43	.44	.01	+
680	510	RATIONAL INOS.	9	0.00	2	400	228	.59	.57	-.02	-
1,120	370	INTERMED. PETRO. CHEM.	9	0.00	15	6350	2622	.41	.42	.01	+
2,600	1,380	UNIV. CHEM. INOS.	12.0	6.99	1	50	72	1.45	1.43	-.02	-
3,000	990	MRTL. CARL WIRE. HFAC	26.0	0.00	2	350	381	1.14	1.08	-.06	-
800	530	JOR. SULPHO-CHEM	9	0.00	16	6250	3583	.57	.58	.01	+
1,410	1,150	ARAB PHARM. CHEM.	15.4	5.79	5	1250	1513	1.18	1.21	.03	+
1,800	820	UNIV. MOON. INOS.	9	0.00	41	23980	19732	.82	.83	.01	+
1,410	690	JOR. INOS. RESOURCES	10.1	13.33	15	7050	5241	.73	.75	.02	+
960	810	JOR. NEW CABLE CO.	16.5	0.00	6	6375	5736	.90	.90	.00	+
1,900	1,340	2L - RAY READY WARE	46.1	0.00	21	28300	36936	1.35	1.21	-.14	-
1,260	1,080	INTL. TOBACCO	6.6	0.00	11	20000	23840	1.16	1.20	.04	+
1,200	860	UNION CH. & VEG.	46.4	0.00	12	63250	63260	1.00	1.02	.02	+
810	590	JORDAN STEEL	31.2	7.25	6	6600	4570	.69	.69	.00	+
840	570	MID. EAST COMPLEX	7.5	16.39	2	1000	610	.64	.61	-.03	-
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 110.54	%CHG: +0.78	299	418557	880398				
GRAND TOTAL			INDEX: 166.63	%CHG: +0.49	455	656414	1504103				
PARALLEL MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR WEDNESDAY 04/02/1998											
N	3,050	990	EXPORT & FIN. INV. 75%	E	0.00	3	4700	3525	1.00	1.00	-
N	610	340	JOR. TRADE FAC.	9.9	0.00	2	1000	370	.37	.37	-
N	800	660	UNION INV. 50%	9	0.00	2	2700	540	.70	.70	-
N	570	360	ARAB FIN. INVEST.	9	0.00	41	286397	163244	.56	.59	.03
N	500	360	ARAB INTL. INV. 50%	31.1	0.00	6	10000	1000	.10	.10	-
N	750	380	NATL. MULT. ENG. NAHICO	9	0.00	49	129650	50722	.40	.39	-.01
N	1,200	890	READY MIX CONCRETE	14.8	0.00	16	14800	18096	1.17	1.23	.06
N	1,500	860	UNION TOBACCO 75%	9	0.00	4	189	207	1.36	1.36	-
N	730	550	RALI PHARM	9	0.00	3	1800	1278	.71	.71	-
N	470	240	INDOS. ERG.	9	0.00	3	1150	312	.28	.28	-
N	950	560	ADVANCED PHARMA. INV.	9	0.00	18	11200	6272	.57	.56	-.01
N	830	490	NATL. POULTRY	9	0.00	6	5250	2853	.53	.55	.02
N	950	660	OPTICAL HEARING 75%	E	0.00	1	300	19	.66	.63	-.03
N	1,310	1,000	NUTRIDAR	E	0.00	10	2005	3285	1.10	1.09	-.01
GRAND TOTAL			164	471891	293423						

THE Daily Crossword

Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

ACROSS

- Bit of info
- Face of a
- gauge
- Giant creature
- Bring it
- Singer Guthrie
- Shelterward
- Jack Barry's game show
- Pre-owned
- Had a bite
- Swindler
- Legs of lamb
- Chicago team
- Heart of the matter
- John Jacob and Mary
- Interpret
- Full of froth
- Attenuated
- Comic Fox
- Soprano — Ts Kanawa
- Crosses
- shallows
- Woe is me!
- Idia of Monty Python
- Spanish cheers
- Relative size
- Long-time
- Dolphin coach
- Stevenson's Or.
- Old sailors
- D.C. insiders
- Piles of stones
- Lively dance
- Obtained
- Indians of New Mexico
- Part of TCUF
- "Shoe" and "Peanuts"
- Little lakes
- Requested
- Agnew, the veep
- City on the Po
- Check of Jazz
- Cutoff-man's function
- Moe of politics
- Brief Ford
- Sprawls lazily
- General classification
- "Magnum P.I." star

DOWN

- vu
- Plenty
- Appropriate
- Shashone Indian
- Hottest planet
- Morning events
- Garden dandy
- Completely
- Room and board
- Sitcom
- sweeteners
- Besides
- Come together
- Garden plots
- Boo-hoo
- Part of TCUF
- "Shoe" and "Peanuts"
- Little lakes
- Requested
- Agnew, the veep
- City on the Po
- Check of Jazz
- Cutoff-man's function
- Moe of politics
- Brief Ford
- Sprawls lazily
- General classification
- "Magnum P.I." star
- "Star Wars" pilot Solo
- "She's Got a Way" singer
- Lap dogs, for short
- Former Russian ruler
- Car
- Aware of
- Can. cops
- Essence
- In the past
- Ring decisions, in brief
- Chill
- Entertainer Zadora

Peanuts

BOY, THE SNOW IS COMING DOWN HEAVIER THAN EVER...

WHAT WE NEED IS SOMEONE TO GO OUT TO THE MAILBOX...

SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T MAKE A BIG DEAL OUT OF EVERYTHING.

Andy Capp

HOW WAS YOUR NIGHT CUT WITH HIM?

SHORT-HE WANTED TO GO TOO FAR!

THAT COACH TRIP TO THE SMOOKER TOURNAMENT? THAT'S RIGHT!

SHE WON'T GET ANOTHER CHANCE!

Mutt'n'Jeff

OH NO!

YOU STUPID BALL, MOVE!

Merchants: Cairo pressuring against trade with Israel

From the Jerusalem Post

EXPORTS TO Egypt declined last year "due to signals from the Egyptian government" and the imposition of various barriers, the Federation of Chambers of Commerce has said.

"There wasn't a single trade delegation from Egypt last year," and there were very few visits from businessmen, said Mandy Barak, head of the federation's international department.

Egyptian ambassador Mohammed Bassiouny said that bilateral trade stagnated in 1997 due to the political atmosphere, after years in which trade volume doubled annually.

In 1997, exports to Egypt dropped 5.3 per cent to \$54.82 million, while imports from Egypt totalled \$30.4 million, an increase of 21.3 per cent, Mr. Barak said, noting that some imports, especially food products, are actually destined for Palestinian Authority areas.

Economic relations

with Egypt began stagnating after the arrest for espionage in late 1996 of Israeli textile worker Azzam Azzam, and the detention in Cairo last summer of Israeli businesswoman Dvora Ganani, Mr. Barak said.

"There are people who are afraid to go there to make new contacts and deals," he added.

According to Mr. Barak, the Egyptian government issued an order that importers must show documents proving that Israeli products are not produced in the territories of the Golan Heights.

"This scared many importers, and is yet another barrier to trade," he said.

Mr. Bassiouny denied his government is doing anything to discourage business with Israel. He said all Israelis are welcome to do business in Egypt, "as long as they respect the law."

Trade expansion has stopped "because there is a stalemate in the peace process," he said. The private sector is affected by the political

situation and the peace process.

"There is a big difference between peace and the fruits of peace," Mr. Bassiouny said. "When Egypt made peace with Israel, we did not aim at a separate peace. It was the first step at a comprehensive peace. Economic relations will be much better under the umbrella of comprehensive peace."

Mr. Bassiouny said cooperation in agriculture is going well, and Egypt is supplying Israel with around 20 per cent of its crude oil.

Trade with other Arab countries has also been declining, Mr. Barak said, with exports to Tunisia dropping 88 per cent in 1997, from \$3 million to less than \$500,000, and to Morocco by 21.9 per cent to \$4.8 million. Data about trade with states that have no formal ties with Israel, including Saudi Arabia and Lebanon, is not released, so as to protect business with those countries.

Second biggest Islamic bank reports higher 1997 profits

DUBAI (AFP) — The world's second biggest Islamic bank has reported an increase of around 12 per cent in net profits in 1997 due to an upturn in investment and other operations.

Net profits by the Dubai Islamic Bank (DIB) stood at 63 million dirhams (\$17.16 million) in 1997 compared with \$6.3 million (\$1.71 million) in 1996, the bank's balance sheet showed.

Operating income grew by five per cent to 505 million dirhams (\$137.6 million) from 481 million dirhams (\$131 million), according to the balance sheet, which is not audited by DIB's general assembly.

It showed a growth of around 19 per cent in assets to 8.4 billion dirhams (\$2.28 billion) from 7.1 billion dirhams (\$1.93 billion).

Customer deposits also jumped by nearly 18 per cent to 7.57 billion dirhams (\$2.06 billion) from 6.37 billion dirhams (\$1.73 billion).

The report showed most of the profits came from internal and foreign investments as well as Murabaha, which involves trading in

real estate, cars, equipment and other materials in line with Islamic law.

DIB, owned by private investors, was the top Islamic bank in the world before Abu Dhabi approved last year the creation of the biggest bank of its kind with a paid-up capital of one billion dirhams (\$272.4 million).

DIB's capital stood at 497 million dirhams (\$135.4 million) at the end of 1997 following a series of increases by the shareholders.

DIB was among creditors who were affected by the 1991 collapse of the Abu Dhabi-controlled Bank of Credit and Commerce International as it had an interest-free deposit of around \$81.7 million with the bank.

Islamic banks do not deal in interest on the grounds it is prohibited in Islam as usury. They invest mainly in interest-free enterprises and charge a percentage of the profits from the projects they finance.

Adaileh reveals output, sales figures of Rashidiyeh cement

AMMAN (Petra) — The Rashidiyeh cement factory has produced 1,740,000 tonnes of clinker, which constitute 95 per cent of the cement components, while it has produced 1,881,000 tonnes of the high specifications Portland cement, according to the factory director, Mohammad Adaileh.

He noted that the local consumption of the Portland cement produced by

the factory amounted to 960,000 tonnes last year.

Mr. Adaileh added that 900,000 tonnes have been exported to the Syrian, Palestinian and South East Asian markets, including 357,000 tonnes to Syria.

A total of 1,298 employees, including administrative and support staff are working in the factory. Nearly 70 per cent of them are from the local community of Tafleeh.

Mr. Adaileh highlighted the factory's contribution to the local community development, saying that the factory last year provided JD45,000 worth of assistance to the Tafleeh Governorate and JD 7,000 to the other governorates in the southern region, in addition to construction of agricultural and main roads in Tafleeh, as well as the other southern governorates.

Samsung Group to cut overseas production by up to 40 per cent

SEOUL (AFP) — South Korea's leading Samsung Group will cut its overseas production by up to 40 per cent this year under pressure to downsize its bulky operations and reduce heavy borrowing, officials have said.

"New group guidelines have been adopted to cut the operational ratio of our overseas plants by up to 40 per cent," a group spokesman told AFP.

Samsung, which estimates its total 1997 sales at \$93 billion, including \$39 billion overseas, has been under pressure to speed up downsizing.

It is blamed, as are other giant South Korean conglomerates, for the excessive borrowing for expansion that fuelled the current financial crisis.

"Our overseas operations cannot be exempt from the

pain of downsizing efforts as we face a deep recession here and throughout Asia," the spokesman said. He did not specify regional production cuts.

Samsung, one of the world's largest microchip producers and the country's biggest conglomerate in terms of sales, called for a "readjustment of production sites and regional rationalization."

REUTERS The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates									
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	-	1.8074	0.5053	1.4588	123.93	1.4448	1784.80	2.0379	6.0602
DE Mark	0.5533	-	0.3345	0.8062	68.59	0.8000	986.90	1.1271	3.3613
GB Sterling	1.6522	2.9872	-	2.4082	204.92	2.3904	2950.26	3.3686	10.0169
CH Franc	0.6884	1.2396	0.4146	-	85.07	0.9920	1223.71	139.75	4.1561
JP Yen	0.0081	1.4572	0.4873	1.1745	-	1.1859	14.38	164.20	4.8811
CA Dollar	0.6912	1.2479	0.4185	1.0112	1.17	-	1231.91	1.4069	4.1831
IT Lira	0.0005	0.0123	0.3385	0.0816	1441.13	0.8100	-	11.41	3.3913
NL Guilder	0.4907	0.8870	0.2967	0.7152	60.82	0.7098	875.54	-	2.9714
FR Franc	0.1650	0.2983	0.0998	0.24447	20.45	0.2387	33.62	33.6200	-

Middle Eastern Currencies									
Currency	USD	JOD	SAR	BAH	QAT	KUW	AED	LBP	EGP
US Dollar	-	0.7090	3.7605	0.3770	3.6410	0.3054	3.6728	1529.00	3.3956
Jordan Dinar	1.4104	-	8.2398	0.5317	5.1364	0.4307	8.1803	2156.56	4.7905
Saudi Riyal	0.2665	0.1890	-	0.1005	0.97	0.0814	0.98	407.68	0.9056
Bahrain Dinar	2.65	1.8808	9.9491	-	9.56	0.6100	9.74	4056.03	9.0099
Qatar Dinar	0.2746	0.1947	1.0301	1.0301	-	0.0839	1.01	419.94	0.9328
Kuwait Dinar	3.2749	2.3219	12.2826	1.2346	11.92	-	12.03	8007.37	0.9328
Emirate Dinar	0.2723	0.1930	1.0212	1.0205	0.8913	0.0831	-	416.30	0.9248
Lebanese/1000	0.65	0.4637	2.4529	0.2485	2.3813	0.1997	2.4021	-	2.2214
Egyptian	0.2944	0.2087	1.1042	0.1110	1.0720	0.0839	1.0814	450.17	-

Energy			Mid-East Currencies			
Oil	Last	Previous	Currency	USD	DEM	JPY
Brent	14.84	15.03	SA Riyal	0.2556	0.4823	0.16134
W. Texas	15.57	16.40	AE Dirham	0.2723	0.49247	0.16476
Bonny	14.84	15.03	KW Dinar	3.2749	5.92417	1.98177
Dubai	12.70	13.40	BH Dinar	0.3770	4.79846	1.50639
UL Gas	159.00	150.00	CY Pound	1.8781	3.3956	1.136

Metal Prices			Currency Deposit Rates (Bid)					
Metal	Bid	Offer	Period	- 1 -	- 3 -	- 6 -	- 9 -	- 1 -
Gold (oz's)	298.4	298.8	Ccy	Month	Months	Months	Months	Year
Silver (oz's)	5.88	7.02	USD	5.53	5.50	5.50	5.57	8.57
Platinum (oz's)	391.6	393.5	GBP	7.38	7.43	7.43	7.26	7.38
AL (3 Months)	1615	1518	JPY	0.43	0.37	0.45	0.50	0.51
CU (3 Months)	1710	1715	DEM	3.19	3.43	3.53	3.44	3.72
Zinc (3 Months)	1102	1103	FRF	3.42	3.49	3.57	3.62	3.74
Lead (3 Months)	532	534	CHF	0.95	1.06	1.25	1.28	1.63
Ni (3 Months)	5410	5450	ITL	5.18	5.11	5.77	6.44	5.22

Energy			JOD Cross Rates		
Commodity	Last	Delivery	Currency	Buy	Sell
Coffee (c/lbs)	180	Spot	US Dollar	0.708	0.710
Cocoa (\$/ton)	1627	Spot	GB Sterling	1.1815	1.1873
Sugar (\$/ton)	293.5	Spot	OE Mark	0.3893	0.3912
Wheat (\$/ton)	0	Spot	CH Franc	0.4818	0.4843
Soya (c/lbs)	25.52	Spot	FR Franc	0.1161	0.1167
Tea (\$/kg)	225	Spot	JP Yen	0.8634	0.8652
Barley (\$/bsh)	0	Spot	NL Guilder	0.3453	0.347
Rice (\$/ton)	400	Spot	IT Lira	0.2942	0.2962

Asia crisis hits Oracle sales growth, freezes investment

DAVOS, Switzerland (AFP) — Oracle Chairman Larry Ellison has warned that the financial crisis in Asia had halted his firm's sales growth in the region.

"It is very disappointing to see that a region of the world that was generating 50 per cent growth (per year) has gone to almost zero growth so quickly," Mr. Ellison told a briefing at the World Economic Forum here.

Asia accounted for 15 per cent of the software giant's revenues which amounted to \$5.6 billion in fiscal 1997 ending May 31.

The problem was apparent region-wide. Growth in Japan was "okay" but the firm was being hit twice, by the softness of the economy and the weakness of the yen as translated back into U.S. dollars.

"If we were reporting in deutsche marks, our growth would be a lot faster," he said.

Staff expansion in the region had stopped and new investments in the region would be frozen until conditions justified it, Mr. Ellison said.

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COUNTDOWN TO NAGANO GAMES

Asian drug buster targets Olympics

NAGANO (AFP) — The Japanese drug buster who nailed 11 athletes, including seven Chinese swimmers, at the 1994 Asian Games in Hiroshima has been put in charge of the doping control laboratory at the Winter Olympics.

Dr Makoto Ueki, who recalls the guilty parties with near relish, heads a team of 32 people who will screen drug samples from 550 athletes during the Games which start on Saturday. "At the Asian Games we had 11 positive cases — seven world class swimmers and four others including a cyclist and a track and field athlete," said Dr Ueki on Wednesday, at the International Olympic Committee (IOC) approved laboratory within the Nagano Public Health Centre.

Although there were no positive

tests resulting in bans at the 1992 Winter Olympics in Albertville or two years later in Lillehammer, Dr Ueki was reluctant to predict a drug-free Nagano Games.

"It is not for me to try and predict the number of cases we will have here — in the previous Winter Games we have only had one or two small cases," he said.

All the medalists, plus one athlete chosen at random, will be tested during the 16-days of competition while four players will be chosen to give urine samples after every match of the high-profile ice hockey event.

While the detection of erythropoietin (EPO), which has replaced blood doping as a way of boosting red cells, and growth hormones is still virtually impossible, Ueki said that the mysteri-

ous Bromptan could be spotted.

Bromptan, which is little known outside Russia, first showed up in tests during the 1996 Atlanta Olympics but the offenders were later cleared as the empowering effects of the drug were unclear.

"It is not known outside Russia therefore it is hard to detect," said Ueki. "But we have developed a method to detect it which we will be using here."

Professor Doo Catlin, a member of the IOC drug commission, added that testers doubted that Bromptan would show up in Nagano.

"True, we don't know much about it — maybe it's a stimulant — but we can detect it. As soon as there is a test for a drug it goes away," he said.

Record TV audience for Winter Games

NAGANO (AFP) — A record 160 countries will tune in to the Nagano Winter Games, which open Saturday, compared to the 120 which tuned into Lillehammer four years ago.

"The true test of interest in any event is the broadcast coverage. The number of countries broadcasting images of Nagano confirms that the Winter Games are no longer the supporting act for the Summer Games," said IOC Vice President Dick Pound.

For the first time, the Winter Games will be widely followed across Africa, as well as Central and South America, while Australians will see live coverage for the first time Down Under.

In Japan, total coverage of the two-week event will be at 233 hours, twice that of Lillehammer, while despite an eight-hour time difference, sports-mad early birds in France can enjoy 235 hours of action, twice that of 1994.

The Olympic Movement has generated \$513 million dollars in broadcast rights fees for the tournament, up from \$353 million at Lillehammer.

On Monday, International Olympic Committee president Juan Antonio Samaranch insisted that the enormous media presence and the fact that U.S. network NBC have paid nearly \$5 billion for the U.S. rights to show Games up until 2008 would not see the Games sell out to commercial interests.

He said the resulting revenue, allowed the IOC to subsidize its activities, while bringing the Games to so many countries underpinned the universality of the Olympic ideal.



U.S. cross country skiers L-R Justin Wadsworth, Patrick Weaver and Marcus Nash pass a Nagano Olympic sign at the Nordic skiing stadium in Hakuba February 4. The first Olympic cross country event is to be held on February 8, one day after the official opening ceremony of the XVIII Olympic Winter Games (Reuters photo)

Ski jumpers in last challenge before Games

SAPPORO (AFP) — Olympic medal hopefuls from Japan and Europe are to contest the last World Cup ski jump event here on Thursday before the Nagano Winter Games starting this weekend.

A total of 71 jumpers from 14 countries are scheduled to take part in the one day large hill event, a litmus test of the biggest ever Winter Games, which begins on Saturday in the central Japanese city of Nagano.

Japan fields all eight Olympic members at the Sapporo event, including World Cup leader Kazuyoshi Funaki and last year's world champion Masahiko Harada.

"Conditions are not bad at all," said Funaki, who has so far won four events this season, including the prestigious Four Hill title.

"I want to keep the lead (in the World Cup standings), and I hope to gain momentum ahead of the Olympics," the 22-year-old new Japanese hero said.

Harada, who produced a record 140.5 metre leap in Sunday's domestic competition here, is also among pre-event favourites.

Ski ace Seizinger critical of Nagano

BONN (AFP) — German ski ace Katja Seizinger has launched an attack on the International Olympic Committee for choosing Nagano as the venue for the Winter Olympics.

Seizinger said the Games, which open this weekend, will be "a lottery" in many events, and accused IOC members of using accommodation that should have been allocated to alpine skiers.

"All the test events held in Nagano were failures," said the outspoken skier. "The ice on the bobsleigh and luge tracks and the snow for the alpine and nordic skiing events changes all the time depending on the climate and some events will be a lottery," she said in an interview with the SID news agency.

"I don't think that Nagano was a good choice," Seizinger was particularly critical of the lodgings for the alpine skiers in the Olympic village.

"We have asked to be moved to accommodation in Hakuba, which is much closer to the course," she said. "But that accommodation has been reserved for members of the IOC."

"Even though IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch will spend maybe one day at Hakuba, he has taken accommodation for three weeks."

"Preparations have been made pretty well," the Japanese team leader said after official practice. "I will try hard. I don't think I will disappoint Japanese fans," said Harada wearing his

trademark of big smile.

Their European rivals are stopping by here before rushing to Nagano some 750 kilometers south of Sapporo, where Japan hosted its first winter games in 1972. Dieter Thoma, runner-

up to this year's World Cup standings, leads the German ski jump team. Thoma won the Sapporo event a year ago with a record leap.

Three-time world champion Andreas Goldberger of Austria, who was allowed to enter Japan Tuesday despite his cocaine-use record, also attends the event before moving to Nagano.

"I'm glad that I could come to Japan," the Austrian ski jumper said after submitting a written pledge to abide by strict anti-drug laws during his stay.

Goldberger admitted on Austrian television last April that he had tried cocaine at a Vienna disco a year earlier, and was banned from competition for six months by Austria's ski federation.

He also paid a court-ordered fine of 180,000 schillings (\$14,000) last September.

No early elimination for 2006 bidders

NAGANO (AFP) — Six European cities attempting to win the 2006 Winter Olympics will be able to battle right to the bitter end.

The International Olympic Committee on Wednesday dropped the selection policy used for the 2002 Winter Games and 2004 Summer Games whereby the original field of candidates was cut.

Five of nine bidders for the 2002 Games, eventually won by Salt Lake City, were eliminated by an electoral panel, and six of the 11 bidders for the 2004 Athens Games were early casualties.

However IOC director general Francois Carrard warned the decision to let the six remain right up to the final vote was a one-off, and the elimination round would be used for the 2008 Summer Olympic decision.

The candidates for 2006 are Sion, Switzerland; Poprad-Tatry, Slovakia; Zakopane, Poland; the Turin region of Italy; Helsinki, in a bid linked with Lillehammer; and Klagenfurt, Austria, in a three-country bid with Slovenia and Italy.

The IOC will decide who gets the 2006 Winter Games in September, 1999.

English bid for World Cup 'has no chance' — Beckenbauer

MUNICH (AFP) — German football legend Franz Beckenbauer said Tuesday that England should be ordered by Europe's governing body to drop their bid to host the 2006 World Cup finals, allowing Germany to be the lone European candidate.

Beckenbauer said at a sports trade fair here that UEFA should show "guts" and order English FA to drop out of the bidding process.

"If things keep going as they are, a lot of time and money will go down the drain," he said. "When two federations fight each other, a third one is sure to win out."

In this case, Beckenbauer fears South Africa might be given the right to host the 2006 tournament.

"Both federations refuse to speak to each other and are sticking rigidly to their bids. This madness has to be arbitrated soon," the Bayern Munich president demanded.

The German Football Federation (DFB) claims that England's Football Association, buoyed by the success of Euro '96 last year, broke a gentlemen's agreement to respect Germany as Europe's sole claimant for the 2006 finals. The DFB was stung when England announced a rival bid last year, splitting the European lobby. According to Beckenbauer, UEFA supports Germany and ought to show its colours on the issue.

"UEFA should end the whole matter with a joint discussion — if it has the guts. United forces are better," he said. "It is crazy for the English to keep on with their bid, but their campaigning is very aggressive. We have to make clear to the English that they have no chance. The infrastructure is right in Germany and economically there are no problems."

All that is needed, Beckenbauer says, is fresh impetus to modernise the country's stadia.

Wolves, Sheffield United march on

LONDON (AFP) — Wolves finally secured a trip to Premiership Wimbledon in the last 16 of the FA Cup when they scored a 3-0 victory over fellow first division Charlton in Tuesday night's replay.

Skipper Keith Curle converted a 29th-minute penalty — awarded when goalkeeper Andy Petterson brought down Dougie Freedman following a weak backpass by Mark Kinsella.

Lee Naylor, aged just 17 and making only his third start for the club, headed home from a Don Goodman

cross three minutes into the second-half.

And Mixu Paatelainen netted after latching onto a cross from Freedman for the third goal in the 65th minute.

It was a frustrating night for the Londoners.

They had striker Mark Bright sent off after a clash with Wolves goalkeeper Mike Stowell and they lost midfielder Matty Holmes following a tackle by Wolves defender Kevin Muscat.

Plucky Cardiff were unable to keep the third

division flag flying when they lost a sudden-death penalty shoot-out at first division Reading, who now visit Sheffield United who saw off Ipswich 1-0 in their replay.

North of the border Ross County substitute Derek Adams scored a dramatic last-gasp penalty to dump First Division Airdrie out of the Scottish Cup.

Third Division County more than held their own throughout this third round replay and now qualify for a home tie with another First Division side in Dundee.



German pairs figure skater Mandy Woetzel practices without her partner Ingo Steuer February 4 in Nagano. The pairs' chance for an Olympic medal may be in doubt due to an injury suffered by Steuer, which may be severe enough to keep them from the competing (Reuters photo)

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	Pierce Brosnan as James Bond 007...TOMORROW NEVER DIES Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	PINOCCHIO Shows: 12:30, 3:30 THE PEACEMAKER Shows: 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	STARSHIP TROOPERS Shows: 3:00, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30 GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE Shows: 12:00, 1:30, 5:00	CONCORD "1" Adel Imam & Yusra ... in RISALA ILA AL WALI (ARABIC) Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:00, 8:15, 10:30 CONCORD "2" MR. BEAN Shows: 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	ABDOUN Adel Imam & Yusra ... in RISALA ILA AL WALI (ARABIC) Shows: 6:00, 8:15, 10:30	ABDOUN SPEED 2 Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 8:30, 10:30 HOME ALONE 3 Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:30	THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SERVICE OF PEOPLE Starring Hisham Yanes and Amal Dabbas For reservations call: 640155, 625155

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Salt Lake opens arms to women

NAGANO (AFP) — Salt Lake City Games organisers have responded to International Olympic Committee President Juan Antonio Samaranch's call for a women's revolution in sport. The 2002 Winter Games organisers want to allow women to compete in ski jumping, bobsleigh and doubles luge. "We are very receptive to these questions being raised. We'll work with the international federations to discuss what addition sports may be considered for 2002," Salt Lake City organising committee president Frank Jorklik said Wednesday. "The Olympic movement is determined to make its contribution so that the 21st century marks the beginning of a new era for women in world sport," Samaranch said at Monday's opening ceremony of the IOC Session. Women's hockey makes its debut at the Nagano Games.

Greene sets new 60m record

MADRID (AFP) — Maurice Greene of the United States set a new world indoor record for the men's 60m here Tuesday when he clocked 6.39secs. Greene, who took the gold medal for the 100m at the World Championships in Athens last August, shaved two hundredths of a second off the previous best time set by fellow-American Andre Cason in February 1992. Greene equalled Cason's record in Stuttgart on Sunday. In Tuesday's race, Greene streaked home ahead of compatriot Jon Drummond (6.50) and Nigeria's Davidson Ezinwa (6.57).

United States to face Paraguay

CHICAGO (AFP) — World Cup qualifiers the United States and Paraguay will meet in a friendly international in San Diego next month. The Americans, who will play in Group F in the World Cup in France, will face Paraguay, who will contest Group D, on March 14, the United States Soccer Federation said Tuesday. The match adds to a busy programme for the United States, who are currently playing in the CONCACAF Gold Cup tournament, in which they beat Cuba 3-0 in their opener. They beat Sweden 1-0 in a friendly game in Orlando on January 24 and will also play World Cup qualifiers Holland on February 21 in Miami and Belgium on February 25 in Brussels.

Wednesday sign Pole on loan

HAMBURG (AFP) — Sheffield Wednesday have signed Hamburg's Polish defender Pavel Wojtala on loan until the end of the season. The German club said on Tuesday. Under the deal, English Premiership club Wednesday will pay Hamburg an initial fee of 150,000 German marks (\$83,000) plus an additional 50,000 marks for each appearance the 25-year-old makes. The Hillsborough club also have an option to buy Wojtala at the end of the season, having agreed a fee of 2.2 million marks. Wojtala, who signed for Hamburg from Polish club Widzew Lodz a year ago, made only 14 appearances in the Bundesliga.

Third Georgian joins City

MANCHESTER (AFP) — Manchester City will soon have a third Georgian in their English First Division side after finally receiving a work permit to allow defender Kakhaber Tskhadadze to start his career in England. City beat English Premiership giants Liverpool to the signature of the giant centre-back and now plan to plunge him straight into their battle against relegation at Norwich on Saturday. City persuaded the Georgian captain to join them from Russian side Alania Vladikavkaz for £300,000 pounds (\$480,000) last month despite an offer of an extended trial from Liverpool. Tskhadadze will join fellow countrymen Giorgi Kinkladze, who had a minor operation this week to clear up a mouth abscess, and former Alania teammate Murtaz Shelia at Maine Road.

Tillstrom upsets Pioline in Marseille

MARSEILLE (AFP) — Mikael Tillstrom of Sweden scored an upset three-set victory over fifth-seeded Frenchman Cedric Pioline Tuesday in the first round of the \$539,250 Marseille ATP Tour event.

Tillstrom won 7-6 (7/3), 3-6, 7-5 but three other seeded players, including top-seeded Russian Yevgeny Kafelnikov, advanced. Kafelnikov defeated Juan Albert Viloca of Spain 6-4, 6-3, third seed Sergi Bruguera of Spain downed his compatriot Tomas Carbonell 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 and No. 8 seed Julian Alonso of Spain edged Frenchman Lionel Roux 6-7 (3/7), 6-3, 6-3.

Kafelnikov was playing his first tournament match since missing the Australian Open with a knee injury but was given few problems by Viloca.

Pioline lost in the first round of the tournament for the second straight year, but paid tribute to Tillstrom.

"He played a great match and his game was difficult to read," said the Frenchman.

Jordan's Davis Cup team leaves for Bangladesh Friday

By Aileen Banoayan
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Kingdom's Davis Cup team leaves for Bangladesh Friday to compete in the prestigious tournament grouping countries from around the world.

Jordan will be playing in the Asia/Oceania Zone Group 4 which includes Oman, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Brunei, and hosts Bangladesh.

Only the top two of the seven-team group will be promoted to Group 3.

Jordan was relegated to Group 4 in 1995 and failed to gain promotion during the last two years after playing in groups 2 and 3 previously.

The Davis Cup competition is played on a round-robin format with two singles and one doubles match for each team daily.

Countries participating in the annual team tournament are classified into five groups with the world's top teams like the United States, France and Germany playing in the prestigious World Group. The other countries are divided into four regional groups.

"We hope to be able to compete with Iraq and Bangladesh for the top two qualifying spots. We have a good team," Jordan Tennis Federation (JTF) Vice-President Talal Maher told the Jordan Times.

The team will be represented by top ranked brothers Faris and Laith Azzouni, Ahmad Al Hadid, and Yazid Nuseirat.

While 15-year-old Nuseirat will be making his

Davis Cup debut, Faris and Hadid were part of the team last year, when Jordan could not attain an advanced standing playing against Brunei, Tajikistan, the UAE, Syria and Oman. Tajikistan and Syria eventually qualified.

"Having the experienced Azzouni brothers has boosted our chances but had they been joined by Khaled Nafa' who is absent for personal reasons this year, our chances would have multiplied," Maher noted.

Maher said the team had been training under the supervision of head coach Khatem Hussein, formerly Iraq's top ranked player, and Ahmad Oreibi since September but acknowledged the fact that players lacked serious match practice.

"Friendly ties against other teams in Amman or abroad could not be arranged for a host of reasons. We would have preferred to have been better prepared but we are hoping for the best. We are hopeful with the rise of new, young talents in the country," Maher added.

During the past four years the JTF has been trying to return the team to its previous Group 2 ranking but has been unable to maintain a consistent and experienced lineup of players to be prepared all-year round.

The Davis Cup Zonal Group 3 and 4 includes 59 nations divided as follows:

• American Zone Group 3 (the top two promoted to Group 2)

• American Zone Group 4 (the top two promoted to Group 3)

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Palestinians warn of violence, accuse Israel of making mockery of peace

Combined agency dispatches

PALESTINIANS accused Israel Wednesday of making a "mockery" of peace negotiations and courting violent protests by approving construction of 132 more Jewish units on disputed land in Jerusalem.

Palestinian officials charged Israel with exploiting the fact that world attention was riveted on the Iraq crisis to expand the Jewish presence in illegally annexed Arab east Jerusalem.

The interior ministry issued authorization Tuesday for construction of 132 units in the Ras Al Amoud, although a government spokesman said there was no intention to start building immediately.

A top aide to Palestinian President Yasser Arafat warned that construction of the units would exacerbate tensions already running high after the failure of U.S. efforts to break the 10-month deadlock in peace negotiations.

"The decision to build homes at Ras Al Amoud is a spark to light the fuse which will turn our already tense

relations into an explosion," Ahmad Abdul Rahman told AFP.

"Our people will not accept settlements and it is our people's right to resist this cancerous settlement growth," he said.

"Israel is making a mockery of the peace process," added Hanan Ashrawi, who holds the higher education portfolio in President Arafat's cabinet.

She accused Israel of exploiting the current crisis with Iraq "to draw attention

away from its policies of settlement."

"This is a clear and deliberate insult" to the United States, which has called on Israel to call a halt to settlement construction as part of a package of proposals to revive the peace process.

But a spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the interior ministry approval was "just technical" and resulted from a petition to the high court by Palestinians waiting for construction of their neighbourhood.

"The government will not allow construction at Ras Al Amoud. This is a bureaucratic matter that has to do with their petition to the high court... We have the means to prevent construction," Shai Bazak told Reuters.

Palestinians say Jewish settlement in Arab east Jerusalem and other areas Israel occupied in 1967 is illegal and thwarts peace-making.

Israel-PNA peace talks collapsed last March when Israel launched a settlement project for Jews on Jabal Abu Ghneim in Arab east Jerusalem.

"This is another destructive step taken by this government to create a new problem in Jerusalem," said Faisal Al Hussein, the PLO's senior official in Jerusalem.

"We view this as an attempt to put obstacles in the path of any political settlement," he told reporters.

Israel: Construction approval is technicality

Israel apologises to Britain in fiasco over Arafat-Blair letter

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel has apologised to Britain for issuing false complaints about the contents of a letter written by Palestinian President Yasser Arafat to British Prime Minister Tony Blair, officials said Wednesday.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's spokesman, David Bar-Illan, fired off statements to the world press last week accusing Mr Arafat of having sent contradictory promises to U.S. and British leaders about revisions the Palestinian leader said had been made to the Palestinian covenant.

He demanded that the Palestinians cancel all articles in the 1968 document challenging Israel's right to exist as a condition for further troop pullbacks from the West Bank.

The Palestinians say the charter was already revised by their top decision-making body, the Palestine National Council (PNC), in 1996.

To counter the Israeli demands for a renewal of the PNC action, Mr Arafat wrote parallel letters last month to U.S. President Bill Clinton and

Mr Blair pinpointing all the articles cancelled by the council in 1996.

Mr Bar-Illan claimed President Arafat's letter to Mr Clinton mentioned 12 articles which had been entirely cancelled and 16 which had been revised, while the letter to Mr Blair confirmed the annulment of only nine articles and revision of 14.

He said the contradiction was further proof of Israel's argument that Mr Arafat had failed to honour a commitment under earlier peace accords to cancel all clauses in the charter calling for the destruction of Israel.

Wednesday, embarrassed Israeli officials admitted that the letters to President Clinton and Mr Blair were in fact identical but that a typist at Israel's embassy in Washington had led the government to believe they were different.

In transcribing Mr Arafat's letter to Mr Blair, which had been forwarded by the British embassy in Washington, the typist inserted a comma instead of a dash in the list of cancelled clauses, so articles 6-

10 became Articles 6, 10, implying that numbers seven, eight and nine remained in force.

The secretary also failed to mention two other articles as having been deleted, officials in Mr Bar-Illan's office said.

Britain's ambassador to the United States, David Manning, sent a letter of protest to Mr Bar-Illan over the matter.

Mr Manning had himself hailed President Arafat's letter to Mr Blair and said he hoped it would prevent the issue of the charter from undermining efforts to break the 10-month deadlock in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Mr Bar-Illan apologised to Mr Manning and all recipients of the incorrect Israeli version of the letter, officials said.

Israel continues to insist, however, that Mr Arafat's letter and the 1996 PNC decision do not meet their demands for revision of the charter.

Washington also welcomed the Palestinian moves and President Arafat claims Israel is using the issue simply to avoid having to carry out promised troop pullbacks.

Millennium rush to Israel could overwhelm facilities — official

TIBERIAS (AFP) — An expected crush of pilgrims to the holy land for the millennium will overwhelm tourism facilities unless Israel quickly launches a multi-million-dollar infrastructure development programme, an official said Wednesday.

"Tourism ministry figures show that beginning in April 1999 some three million tourists each year will begin visiting sites in the area around the Sea of Galilee," also known as Lake Kinneret, said the head of the Jordan Valley municipal council, Zeev Shor.

"We are in danger of a total collapse of the whole system due to a lack of preparation and

insufficient infrastructure," Mr Shor told AFP.

He charged that with celebrations of the 2000th birthday of Jesus Christ looming, the tourism ministry has not even begun serious efforts to build hotels, parking lots, sewerage and water systems for tourists in the north.

"Pilgrims will not have places to stay or park and will be very frustrated if we don't start work immediately," Mr Shor said.

"I have sent a six-month, 30-million-dollar emergency plan to the ministry that I hope they will accept," he said.

Mr Shor said he estimated the pilgrims would arrive in the

Galilee region where Jesus spent his youth at the rate of 10,000 a day, causing massive traffic jams if large "park and boat" lots are not built around the lake.

The tourism ministry estimates that as many as five million tourists will arrive in Israel in 2000 alone, double the number that came in 1996.

Palestinian authorities in Bethlehem, by Christian tradition the birthplace of Jesus, are also struggling to prepare for the arrival of pilgrims.

Israel is constructing some 20,000 hotel rooms in preparation for the festivities.

Cyprus says missiles will arrive on time

NICOSIA (AFP) — Cyprus said Wednesday that it has received fresh assurances from Russia that the S-300 missiles purchased by this eastern Mediterranean island will be delivered on schedule.

Foreign Minister Yiannakis Cassoulides said the assurance was in a message delivered by Russian Ambassador Giorgi Muratov to Cypriot President Glafcos Clerides Monday.

President to repeat the reassurances of the Russian side that the contract for the S-300 missiles would be kept to fully, despite international objections," Mr Cassoulides said.

The United States and Britain have said the Russian-made ground-to-air missiles, scheduled for delivery in a few months, would only heighten tensions on this divided island.

The internationally recognised Greek-Cypriot govern-

ment's decision in January 1997 to go ahead with the purchase of the S-300 missiles sparked an angry response from Ankara, which says the weapons are capable of hitting targets in southern Turkey.

Turkey has warned it will use force to prevent delivery of the missiles, scheduled for mid-1998, and in military exercises in northern Cyprus in November Turkish forces carried out a mock attack to destroy the weapons.



CUSTARD PIE LEAVES WORD PERFECT GATES SPEECHLESS: Microsoft boss Bill Gates got an unexpected taste of a Belgian speciality here on Wednesday. As he got out of his car at the 'Concert Nohel' in Brussels, where he was addressing a conference marking the 10th Anniversary of Flanders Technology, the computer magnate was hit full in the face by four fresh cream tarts. Noel Godin, a notorious practical joker who specialises in custard pie attacks on celebrities, immediately claimed responsibility for orchestrating the operation that left the normally Word Perfect Gates speechless. 'After taking four pies straight in the face he could hardly say anything,' he said (AFP photo)

White House says Blair's U.S. visit to focus on Iraq

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The United States and Britain will focus on their joint determination to stand up to Iraq during a visit here this week by British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

The crisis that followed Baghdad's refusal to allow U.N. weapons inspectors to view specified sites in Iraq "is very much front and centre on the minds of the president and the prime minister," White House spokesman Michael McCurry said last weekend.

Mr Blair arrives in Washington Thursday for a four-day official visit that will include talks with U.S. President Bill Clinton.

Among other topics on the agenda for Thursday's talks are Bosnia, Northern Ireland, the Middle East peace process and NATO enlargement, Mr McCurry said.

The similarity of views

between Washington and London on the Iraq crisis was in evidence last week during U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's visit to London, where she held talks with British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook.

Mr Blair also reaffirmed London's commitment to supporting any necessary military action against Baghdad.

"If we conclude that the only option to enforce the [U.N.] Security Council's will is military action, we will not shrink from it," Mr Blair said at a Labour Party meeting.

London on Monday sent six Harrier jets to the Gulf, where they will join the aircraft carrier HMS Illustrious.

So far, Britain is the only U.S. ally to have offered such unequivocal support for a possible military strike against Iraq.

For its part, Washington has

agreed to support Britain's request for a Security Council resolution declaring Iraq in violation of its U.N. obligations — even though Washington considers the move unnecessary.

"To the extent it could be helpful, fine. But it's not necessary. We think we have all the legal basis for taking other action," a U.S. official said.

Mr Clinton and Mr Blair's talks on Thursday are expected to last for two hours.

On Friday the two are due to address a joint news conference, which is keenly awaited here because it will be the first time Mr Clinton answers questions from the media since claims emerged two weeks ago that the president had an affair with a former White House intern.

Mr Clinton can expect Mr Blair to be supportive on that issue too. The British prime

minister had already expressed his sympathy in a telephone conversation with Mr Clinton last week.

Mr McCurry said the two would probably discuss Mr Clinton's personal problems in a very general manner.

White House officials have said Mr Blair would likely take part in Mr Clinton's weekly Saturday radio address on Feb. 6.

Mr Blair was also scheduled to meet congressional leaders and to visit a school in Washington — possibly with Mr Clinton.

The Blairs will spend Friday night with the Clintons at the Camp David residential retreat — a further indication that Washington is determined to highlight the "special relationship" between the United States and Britain.

Khamenei confirmed as Iran's supreme leader

TEHRAN (AFP) — An assembly of prominent Iranian clerics has confirmed Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as the Islamic republic's supreme leader despite several challenges to his rule, the body said in a statement on Wednesday.

The Assembly of Experts, which is tasked with appointing the spiritual leader, the highest authority, stressed the primacy of the "Velayat-e-Faqih," or the religious government which finds expression in the supreme leader.

"Velayat is the source of national power and unity," it said at the end of a three-day meeting in the holy city of Mashhad, northeastern Iran.

The system of Velayat was established after the 1979 Islamic Revolution to ensure the survival of the religious government in Iran.

The late founder of the Islamic republic Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini occupied the post until he died in 1989. The assembly then voted Ayatollah Khamenei, 58, into the office, which is guaranteed all-encompassing powers far beyond those enjoyed by the president.

The members of the assembly are directly elected by universal suffrage for eight years. It is presided by Ayatollah Ali Meshkini, the Friday prayer leader of the holy city of Qom, central Iran, and former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Russia's Gazprom sees no retreat from Iranian gas

MOSCOW (R) — Russian natural gas monopoly Gazprom said on Wednesday that it would go ahead with a \$2 billion deal to tap gas reserves in Iran, despite the threat of U.S. sanctions against it and other participants.

The United States State Department said on Tuesday it had yet to decide whether to impose sanctions against Gazprom and the two other foreign firms involved in the project — France's Total SA and Malaysia's Petronas.

But a department spokesman James Foley said the imposition of sanctions "remains a real possibility."

The U.S. Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) fore-

sees sanctions against foreign firms that invest more than \$20 million in the oil and gas sectors of those two countries.

Gazprom, the world's largest gas company, said it would not be deterred from going ahead with the project to develop the huge offshore South Pars gas and condensate field.

"We will take part in the south pars project, because it does not break any laws — Russian, Iranian or French," said Gazprom spokesman Dmitry Dankin.

"The losses of any sanctions would be suffered above all by the Americans," he told Reuters.

Mr Dankin said that Gazprom's interests in Iran

had the full backing of Russia's political elite, all the way up to President Boris Yeltsin.

First Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov told a local radio station late in January that the government would protect Russian interests anywhere in the world.

"Our interest is that Gazprom takes part in the development of its [Iran's] reserves in South Pars," Mr Nemtsov added.

In the past the U.S. has accused Iran of pursuing a nuclear weapons programme, sponsoring terrorism and undermining the Middle East peace process.

Sudan's government bans food drops

NAIROBI (AFP) — The Sudanese government Wednesday banned air-drops by the U.N. World Food Programme (WFP) to some 150,000 Sudanese displaced by fighting between rebels and government troops in the south, the agency announced.

WFP started the emergency air-drops Tuesday in Bar Al Ghazal state for people displaced by fighting between Khartoum government troops and the Sudan People's Liberation Army at Wau, Arwil and Gogrial.

A C-130 Hercules aircraft based at Lokichokio, in northern Kenya, made two

runs Tuesday and one Wednesday morning before the ban, spokeswoman Brenda Barton told AFP.

She said the government banned the flights on security grounds, but said it would consider specific requests for drops in areas of acute human need "on a case-by-case basis."

The agency was now formulating such requests, she said.

The government had promised to review the ban once the security situation changed, Ms Barton said, adding that flights were continuing, with government permission, to other

areas in the south.

On Tuesday, the agency said that the fighting in Bar Al Ghazal "broke out very suddenly, and has prompted thousands of townspeople to abandon their homes with virtually no belongings — no food, no water, no clothing, and no shelter materials."

"The estimated 100,000-150,000 civilians are fleeing in about four different directions," a statement said.

"They are now living in the bush and in very small villages. Most of the displaced are women and children."



Little Mermaid to resume wistful vigil

COPENHAGEN (AP) — The Little Mermaid is about to resume her wistful vigil at Copenhagen's harbour, four weeks after the bronze statue's head was sawn off. The head was reattached over the weekend and workmen were smoothing over the welding seam, said city spokesman Per Langsoe Christensen. No one has been arrested for the vandalism of Copenhagen's beloved landmark which draws about a million visitors a year. The head was returned by a hooded man who dropped it off at a television station three days after it was hacked off. The statue, based on the Hans Christian Andersen tale was erected on a rock at the edge of the harbour in 1913.

Daniel Baldwin hospitalised after drug binge

NEW YORK (AFP) — U.S. actor Daniel Baldwin has been hospitalised after going berserk in a New York hotel room because of a binge of crack-smoking, one of his brothers said Tuesday on local television. Baldwin, 37, was found "naked and bleeding" in a room of the Plaza Hotel, according to the New York Post. During his arrest he was described as "raving and incoherent." The paper said he was hospitalised in critical condition. But his brother Billy told NY One television that Daniel Baldwin was doing better on Tuesday.

And the rich get richer...

TEL AVIV (AFP) — One of Israel's most well-paid business executives won \$1.4 million in the national lottery and then did what anyone else would: quit his job, the Jerusalem Post reported Wednesday. Last week Doron Steiger, chief executive officer of the Israel Corporation, surprised the business community by suddenly resigning from his job at one of Israel's biggest investment companies, which paid him nearly \$30,000 a month. Israel Corporation spokesmen would only say that Steiger resigned for "personal reasons." But the Jerusalem Post said the businessman was taking his lottery winnings to start his own company to manage real estate and financial investments.

Sweden's Electrolux develops robot vacuum cleaner

STOCKHOLM (R) — Swedish appliance maker AB Electrolux said it is working on a way to take the drudgery out of house cleaning — the world's first self-operating vacuum cleaner. The cylindrical machine, which took 10 years to develop, moves around a room using sound waves which alert it to an object in its path. When it senses one, it changes direction. Its brain is a micro-processor which has the same capacity as a personal computer. Electrolux said.

Israeli researchers take the wraps off new coating

TEL AVIV (R) — Food wrapping could be relegated to the dustbin of history if a new Israeli invention catches on. Researchers from Hebrew University's agriculture faculty said they had developed an edible coating for food that could make synthetic wrapping obsolete. Presenting their invention to Israeli manufacturers, they said the clear, tasteless, scentless, natural polymer-based coating — derived from seaweed — would make fruit, vegetables, cheeses, canals and other foods last longer and look better. The researchers said the adhesive coating would extend the shelf life and maintain the colour of products by sealing in water and nutrients.